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THE LAUGHING BUDDHA MURDERS

RICHARD FOSTER

A VULCAN MYSTERY 3

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by

Richard Foster

A VULCAN MYSTERY

Complete - Unabridged

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THE LAUGHING BUDDHA MURDERS

PART I

No longer mourn for me when I am dead . . . .
William Shakespeare.

I

Coroner's Inquest—June 9th

The "inquisition upon the body of Horace Bailey Lawton, deceased" took place on the afternoon of June 9th at the County Morgue building in Cleveland, Ohio. Coroner Franklyn Williams shuffled the papers on his desk, cleared his throat and began looking over his audience, all definite signs that the official inquest was about to begin. In addition to the jury, the witnesses and the reporters, the room was crowded with men and women who had come to the inquest purely out of curiosity. Although few of them could have known the deceased personally, almost every face indicated satisfaction that Horace Bailey Lawton had ceased to live among them.

For several minutes Coroner Williams stared thoughtfully at a black dictaphone cylinder, marked Exhibit B, which stood on a table beside his desk. Upon it was recorded, the coroner reflected, almost a complete and unconscious autobiography of Horace Lawton. He was still recalling the phrases he had heard, when he was aroused from his reverie by an impatient cough from Juror Number Five. Coroner Williams frowned at the offending juror and reluctantly opened the inquest.

The first witness was a heavy-set, gray-haired man who gave his name as Dr. Marcus Allen.

"You are employed by the county, Dr. Allen?" Coroner

Williams asked indifferently. He was always bored by the preliminary questions he had to ask.

"Yes," Dr. Allen said.

"In what capacity?"

"As Autopsy Surgeon."

"You are also a deputy coroner of Cuyahoga County?"

"Yes."

"On Friday, June 6th, you were called to 561 Cleveland Heights Boulevard to examine the body of the deceased, Horace Bailey Lawton?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell the jury, without the use of medical terminology, just what you found."

"The deceased," Dr. Allen said heavily, removing his glasses and twirling them around his forefinger, "had been dead for about an hour, placing the time of death roughly at about nine-thirty that evening. Death was caused by a knife which had been driven in his back, the blade penetrating an inch and a quarter into the left ventricle of the heart."

He likes to feel that he's important, Coroner Williams thought to himself, watching his assistant. Aloud he said:

"Is this the knife?" He held up Exhibit A. The heavy gold handle was covered with small gargoyles, tiny jewels set in their eyes. The shimmering blade tapered to a needle-point.

"It looks like the one," Dr. Allen said.

"You may step down," Coroner Williams said.

He waited until his assistant had seated himself, and then called: "Lieutenant John Payne."

A big-shouldered man, with a rugged face, stepped up and was sworn in. He, too, was thinking about the red tape they had to go through. That was the only thing he didn't like about police work. Otherwise he was a happy man, or would be as soon as this case was solved.

"You hold the rank of a Detective Lieutenant in the Homicide Bureau of the Cleveland Heights Police Department?" the coroner asked.

"I do."

"You were called to 561 Cleveland Heights Boulevard last Friday evening, June 6th?"

"I was."

"By whom?" Coroner Williams asked, drawing a bead on one of the reporters with the point of his pencil.

"By the Lawton butler, Roberts. He called at about nine-fifty and said that Mr. Lawton had been murdered."

" 'Mr. Lawton has been murdered' was his exact phrase?"

"Yes."

"Now, Lieutenant Payne, will you tell the gentlemen of the jury what occurred when you arrived at the Lawton home?"

"The butler met me at the door," Lieutenant Payne said, "and showed me to the study, which was filled with a lot of Chinese idols. I found Mr. Lawton slumped over his desk with this knife here in his back. He was holding the mouthpiece of a dictaphone in his left hand, as though he had been dictating when he was stabbed."

"Just a moment," Coroner Williams interrupted. He picked up the black cylinder, marked Exhibit B. "This is the record which you removed from that machine?"

"It is."

"I have decided," the coroner said, addressing the jury, "that you should hear this record, although its importance as evidence is yet to be determined. For your convenience, I have had an electrician attach a loudspeaker to the dictaphone so that it will not be necessary for everyone to wear earphones. I understand that it was Mr. Lawton's custom to spend part of every evening dictating letters and orders for the following day to his secretary, Mr. Earl Mason. What you are about to hear are the orders that Mr. Mason was to execute Saturday morning June 7th. . . . We must have absolute quiet while this record is being played."

Then the voice of the dead man came out of the loudspeaker and took possession of the room. It was a deep voice, filled with power and authority.

"Earl," the phantom voice said, "take this down and get it to my lawyers in the morning. Tell them to incorporate it in my last will, in the place of the present clause dealing with Betty. 'To my daughter, Elizabeth Lawton, I leave the residue of my estate, with the understanding that she is not to marry Theodore Challet. In the event that she does marry the aforesaid Theodore Challet, she is to receive the sum of one dollar per year, payable each year on the anniversary of her wedding, for life, and the residue of my estate put in a trust fund for a period of twenty years. Should my daughter, at any time during the twenty years, divorce Theodore Challet, she shall then receive the trust fund. But should she still be married to Theodore Challet at the expiration of the twenty years, the entire trust fund is to be turned over to Western Reserve University to found a chair of Tibetan culture.'

"Get that off to Sylvester the first thing, Earl, and tell them to rush it back to me for signing. When you've finished that, call up Challet at the Allen Insurance Company and tell that popinjay that if I so much as catch him looking at my daughter again I'll have him fired and run out of Cleveland. I'll not have that impoverished money-hound chasing after Elizabeth!

"Tell Mrs. Forbes that if her daughter doesn't stop mooning around the house like a sick calf, I'll fire both of them. She wasted half a day yesterday and it's to be taken out of her salary. You can tell Mrs. Forbes that if she comes around with any more of her claims, I'll have her arrested for blackmail. That whole thing was settled fifteen years ago!

"Remind Roberts that I want him to attend the lecture on the habitual criminal which is being given at the Cleveland Hotel at two o'clock, and that he is to take notes and report to me in detail everything that is said.

"Write a note to Green and tell him that if he mentions that dagger again, I'll have him arrested for disturbing the peace, making threats and attempted blackmail. I've got all of his notes for evidence. He's a damn fool anyway or he

wouldn't have lost it.

"Take a telegram to Philip Norton: 'Dear Phil: The new tapestry arrived yesterday. A good buy. By all means try to get the jade Chen-re-zi. Go as high as seventy thousand, if necessary. The limit is ten thousand on the prayer wheel. I don't care where it came from if it's authentic. Will look for you back here in a couple of days.' Sign that Horace. You can get his address from the last letter. He's somewhere in New York.

"Take a letter to Wilson Bruce, publisher of the Cleveland *Post*: 'Dear sir: In your feature story yesterday on quote Graft in Ohio Politics unquote you state in the third paragraph that it was my money that put Governor Shoal in office and that immediately upon taking office he signed a bill which awarded contracts worth three million dollars to a corporation controlled by me, although there were four other companies with lower bids. Unless you immediately make a front page retraction and fire the reporter who wrote the story, I shall instruct my lawyers to sue you.'

"Sometime before lunch, Earl, I want you to call Governor Shoal and tell him that I want that new compensation bill killed before it has a chance to get any publicity. Tell him if he doesn't get action on it, I'll break him like I would a match. He's starting to get a yellow streak up his back just because of a few squawking newspaper stories.

"Drop a note to that friend of yours—is his name Harkins?—and ask him if he's had any word on that copy of the Tengyur from the Eighth Century. Call up Watson of the First National and tell him I want to see him. Then get in touch with my brokers and tell them to dump my utilities stock before the price starts dropping. Which reminds me, you forgot to call them yesterday when I told you to. Your salary will be docked fifty dollars this week for that little oversight. Maybe it'll teach you to remember things in the future.

"There are only a few things more now, and I'll finish the rest in the morning. That Tibetan professor will be here

in a few minutes to see my collection. I'm anxious to see what he'll say when he sees the Laughing Golden Buddha.

"Don't forget to call up Pierce's lawyers and tell them that contract has to be signed and delivered to me by six o'clock tomorrow evening. As soon as the contract is delivered, you call Smith and tell him to go ahead. Something else I forgot: I want you to call the bank the first thing in the morning and stop payment on that check that was drawn to the Cuyahoga Paralytic Association. I see by tonight's paper that Rolfe, who is the chairman of that outfit, is also on the committee that got up that petition to have me investigated. I'll show Rolfe that he can't play both ends against the middle.

"Get those bids ready for Crowley. Make the first one three hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the second one for two hundred and seventy-five thousand and the thir- -"

The voice broke off suddenly with a grunt, and the only sound was the scratching of the needle until an attendant reached over and switched off the machine.

"Will you return to the stand, Lieutenant Payne?" the coroner asked.

As the lieutenant was getting himself settled in the chair, Coroner Williams glanced with distaste at Exhibit C. It was a simple gold clip of the type which women often find both decorative and useful at the top of a dress. There were certain parts of the inquest which he expected to relish, but this was not one of them, he was thinking, as he glanced at the blonde girl who sat down front. He rustled the papers on his desk as though in protest and again turned his attention to Lieutenant Payne.

"You had just discovered the dictaphone record, I believe," he said. "Did you listen to it immediately?"

"I did. I thought since he was dictating when it happened that there might be some connection."

"Of course," the coroner said dryly. "Suppose you tell the jury in your own words what transpired after that."

The coroner leaned back in his chair and began sketching a rough portrait of Juror Number 3.

II

The Night of June 6th

Jack Payne was a name that had once been well known in Ohio. That had been when he was younger, with less indications of thickening through the middle, and had played left tackle on the Ohio State football team. He hadn't distinguished himself for brilliance in either classroom or the football field, but after a couple of years it had gradually dawned on the football fans that there was always a hole on Payne's side of the line. It had taken about that long for the coach to discover it, too, but thereafter Ohio State swept many a winning touchdown through the left side.

There had been a lot of applause, but there was no job when he got out of college. Finally an uncle, with political ties, had arranged for him to be put on a beat in Cleveland Heights. One night there was a murder on his beat. It was a tough one and finally went on the records as unsolved. But Jack Payne was in there plugging as he had on the football field, and one year and three months later he walked into headquarters with the solution. The next day he was a detective. That same plugging had carried him on until he became a lieutenant.

As he rang the bell at 561 Cleveland Heights Boulevard, Lieutenant Payne glanced at his watch and saw that it was ten minutes past ten, just twenty minutes since he had received the call.

The door swung open and someone peered out at the three detectives.

"Police," Lieutenant Payne said shortly, and the door opened wider. The three men stepped inside.

It was the butler who had opened the door. He was a large, phlegmatic-looking fellow, with close-cropped black hair and a rather sullen face.

"You called Headquarters?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. I'll talk to you later. Where's the body?"

"This way, sir." The butler led the way down the hall and stopped just outside a door halfway back.

"In there, sir," he said.

The lieutenant turned to the smaller of the two detectives with him. "Corbett, you go with the butler and see that everybody in the house is gathered together somewhere. He'll show you which room to use."

"I would suggest the library," the butler said. "I believe everyone is already there except the servants."

"Come on, Gallo," Lieutenant Payne said and strode into the study.

Lieutenant Payne was startled by what he saw. It was almost like stepping into another world. Every way he looked there were Buddhas, a full two dozen of them, ranging from a tiny ivory-dust Buddha on the desk to those three or four feet tall that were placed around the room. There were Buddhas of ivory, jade, bronze, iron and gold. There were laughing, fat-bellied Buddhas, and solemn, almost sacred-looking ones.

With his usual attention to detail, he noticed that the half-circle of large Buddhas on the floor was unbroken, with the exception of one gap in the line at the end of the room. He observed it first because of the miniature house which sat beside a huge bronze Buddha to the right of the gap. The house was square, standing perhaps a foot high, made of red and green tile with a roof of gold leaf. Inside there was a tiny throne. A long red scarf lay on the floor beside it, trailing past the empty space. It looked like a woman's scarf, the lieutenant thought, that had been dropped by someone in too big a hurry to retrieve it.

The rest of the room was just as unusual. The walls were covered with brilliant tapestries and strange-looking Oriental objects that he was unable to identify. On top of a bookcase there stood a jade figure with seven heads, each head apparently surveying a different section of the room.

Everything about the Lawton study was so eye-catching that Lieutenant Payne had been barely conscious of the

presence of the corpse, but now he glanced down at the desk. He saw a large man, in a well-tailored gray suit, slumped over the desk. The great shock of gray hair had tumbled down, partially covering an emerald green jade medallion, as though to say that even death could not completely sever this man from his Oriental possessions. And then there was the knife in his back.

Only the handle protruded above the red stain on the back of the gray coat. It was a heavy gold handle, covered with the tiny, leering heads of Oriental gargoyles. Small green jewels glittered in the eyes.

The dead man still grasped the mouthpiece of a dictaphone in his left hand. Lieutenant Payne, his mind traveling in a methodical fashion from the mouthpiece to the dictaphone machine, reached over and pulled the record from the machine. It was then that he noticed the gold clip lying on the floor. He picked it up and handed it to the detective with him.

"If he was dictating when he got it," the detective said, breaking the silence for the first time, "the murderer must have shut the machine off."

"No," Lieutenant Payne said, gesturing towards the dead man's hand resting on the edge of the desk, "I don't think so. His finger is around the trigger, you'll notice, and his hand probably clenched as the knife struck him."

A chime tinkled from the front of the house, and a moment later they heard footsteps coming down the hall. Dr. Marcus Allen, the Deputy Coroner, entered the study.

"Good evening," he said. "What have we here?"

Lieutenant Payne grunted. The Deputy Coroner annoyed him. For as long as Payne could remember, he had been coming into a murder room and saying "What have we here?" So the lieutenant merely gestured towards the body at the desk and let his grunt serve as a greeting.

The two detectives waited in silence while the Deputy Coroner examined the corpse. Finally he straightened up, removed the knife carefully and placed it on the desk. He wiped his hands on a cloth from his bag.

"He's been dead about an hour," he said slowly. "That would place the time of death in the neighborhood of nine-thirty. The knife thrust undoubtedly killed him, probably piercing the heart to a considerable degree. I imagine there were internal hemorrhages and that he died almost immediately. I will be able to tell you more definitely after the autopsy tomorrow, of course."

The Deputy Coroner bustled busily out of the study and returned shortly with two morgue men carrying a wicker basket. They loaded what remained of Horace Bailey Lawton into the basket and departed.

As soon as they were out of the room, Lieutenant Payne put the dictaphone record back in the machine, put on the earphones hanging from the side, threw the machine in reverse and snapped on the switch. He began listening to the heavy voice of Lawton. But if he had expected the record to furnish him with a suspect, he hadn't expected a deluge of them. Whenever anything like that happened, Lieutenant Payne was inclined to suspect that the whole business was worthless.

Before he left, Payne stopped to look the room over once more, this time paying less attention to the Buddhas. It was a large room, fully twenty-five feet square. There were big double windows at one end, but Payne noticed they were locked from the inside and the blinds were drawn. There was only one door into the room, opening from a short corridor that led into the hallway. It was directly back of the desk, which meant that it would have been very easy for someone to enter without being seen by Lawton.

Payne knew about as much about the dead man as everybody in Cleveland knew—and which he had also learned from the papers. Horace Lawton was, as he had always termed himself, a self-made man. He had started out as a contractor and had made millions. In addition, the fortune made in contracting had been pyramided in the stock market. The result was that Lawton was one of the richest men in the country, and among the most influential men in Ohio.

III

The Night of June 6th

There were eight people in the library, in addition to Detective Corbett who leaned against the wall beside the door. At one end of the room stood the butler and two women who were obviously servants. They seemed ill at ease. At the other end were two young women and three men. Payne was somehow surprised to notice that one of the men was Chinese. Then he remembered the reference to the "Tibetan professor" in the dictaphone record and decided that was probably the answer. Beside the Chinese was a smartly-dressed young woman, with dark red hair. Her dress clung fondly to the curves of her body. Hers was the sparkling beauty that made men look twice and then feel a surge of Spring in their veins. Lieutenant Payne was no exception, and he suddenly realized he was staring at her. He had a feeling that she sensed his confusion and was laughing at him. He switched his gaze quickly to the girl beside her.

She was blonde, with a transparent complexion and a slight body that was somehow enticing in its boyishness. She was young, probably no more than twenty, and Payne guessed that this must be Lawton's daughter. Her face was pale but wore no particular expression of grief.

Next to the blonde girl, and holding her hand, was a well-built young man, with close-cropped dark hair. He was well-dressed, but Payne's first impression was that he did not belong to the Lawton set. Perhaps, he reasoned to himself, this was the Theodore Challet mentioned in the record. He glanced at the remaining man, who was somewhat older, perhaps thirty. His appearance, from meticulous blond hair to dark gray suit, was colorless, yet his face showed intelligence and strength. He wore rimless glasses. The secretary, Payne guessed.

"Which of you is Miss Lawton?" he asked.

"I'm Betty Lawton," the blonde girl said. Payne nodded to himself at the confirmation of his guess and automatically

noted that the young man holding her hand was nervous.

"I'm Lieutenant Payne," he said. "I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm afraid I shall have to ask a few questions, and some of them may have to be unpleasant."

"It's all right, Lieutenant," the girl said. "I think it's better if you understand from the beginning that I did not love my father, because he never gave me a chance to, and that I am fully aware that any discussion about him is apt to be unpleasant."

Lieutenant Payne disapproved of this. Certain feelings deserved a decent cloak of hypocrisy.

"There is no Mrs. Lawton, is there?" he asked.

"My mother died eighteen years ago," the girl said. "She had pneumonia, but the doctor said she died because her will to live had been destroyed."

"Who discovered the murder?" Lieutenant Payne asked hastily, trying to put the conversation on a more pleasant plane.

"I did," Betty Lawton said.

"At about what time?"

"It was just twenty minutes to ten when I started in to the study."

"And how did you happen to go in?"

"Because I had just discovered that I had lost a gold clip from my dress either in the hallway or in my father's study. I went back to get it and—found him."

"You were in there earlier, talking to your father?"

"Yes."

"At about what time?"

"It was a quarter past nine when I went out of the study. I don't know how long I was there."

Payne nodded to himself. That fixed the murder within a twenty-five minute period.

"Why did you visit your father's study the first time?" he asked aloud.

"He called me."

"To discuss your attachment for Theodore Challet?"

"How did you know?" the girl asked in surprise.

"I have my methods," Payne answered. He enjoyed the sensation of being mysterious until he caught a smile on the face of the red-headed girl. He flushed and returned to his questioning. "You quarreled?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, her voice low. "He said that he was changing his will so that if I married Ted I wouldn't get a cent of his money. He—he said some nasty things about Ted leaving me when that happened. I was rather upset and I guess that's when I dropped the clip."

"Did you find it when you went back?"

"I didn't look. As soon as I saw him there—like that, I ran and told Roberts to call the police."

"You were here in the library from a quarter past nine until twenty minutes to ten, when you went back to look for the clip?" he asked.

"N-no," she said, hesitating. "I was so upset that I started to cry. Then I had to go upstairs and put on some makeup. It was almost nine-thirty when I entered the library."

"You were upset, yet you went upstairs to put on make-up?" Lieutenant Payne said in some astonishment.

"That's right, Lieutenant," the red-headed girl interposed. Her voice was fresh and vibrant. "Didn't you know that it always settles a woman to put on a little powder and rouge?"

He gave her an "I'll come to you later" look, and then he turned his attention to the young man who was beside Betty Lawton.

"You are Theodore Challet?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Were you aware that Horace Lawton didn't want you to see his daughter?"

"I knew he didn't approve of me but I didn't know he had forbidden her to see me until I called tonight," the young man said, his face pale. It was difficult to tell whether it was fear or anger that caused his pallor.

"What time was that?" Payne asked.

"About eighty-thirty."

"Then he had mentioned the subject before?" Payne said, shifting his gaze to the girl.

"Not directly," the girl said, "but he mentioned it to Earl earlier today and Earl told me. I called Ted at his office and told him not to ring when he called tonight. I watched at the door and let him in myself. Then I told him about father. We were still discussing it when I was called into the study."

"Then you were in the library all the time Miss Lawton was gone?"

"Y-yes."

"You didn't leave it at all?"

Ted Challet hesitated a moment and then said: "No."

Lieutenant Payne reached in his pocket and got a cigar. He put it in his mouth, discovered there were no ashtrays in the room, and removed it. He sighed and looked at the man in the gray suit.

"You're Earl Mason?"

"Yes."

"You were Lawton's secretary?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"Five years."

"You a Cleveland man?"

"No."

"You probably knew more about Lawton's business than anyone else, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Not very talkative, are you?" Payne remarked dryly.

"I have learned," Earl Mason said in his unemotional, bookkeeper voice, "to be concise and to the point, which may be one reason I retained this position five years."

"Uh-huh. Lawton gave you a good salary?"

"Three hundred dollars a week."

"What?" exclaimed Lieutenant Payne, surprise jolting

the word out of him. "I never heard of a secretary getting dough like that."

"It was his custom," Earl Mason said, "to pay everyone more than generous salaries. I believe a psychologist would say it was a matter of soothing his conscience. Of course, many times part of a salary would be deducted as a fine for some action. Miss Lawton's allowance was handled in the same manner."

"What about this collection of Chinese stuff he's got in the study?" Payne asked. "You know all about it?"

"No. There is a complete list of everything, with the value, but I am not familiar with it, other than to know the entire collection is worth well over a half million dollars. It wasn't necessary to know more than the occasional information he gave me."

"That stuff in the study is worth over a half million?"

"Yes."

"And he had no protection for it?"

"It was Mr. Lawton's opinion that no one had nerve enough to steal anything from him. In addition, many of the Buddhas are too heavy to be stolen easily."

"Go into the study now," Payne said, "and check over your list briefly. It's possible that something may be missing. You'll find a detective in there. Just tell him what I sent you in for. Can you do that quickly?"

"Yes."

"While you're in there," Payne said, thinking of something else, "tell Gallo, the detective, to show you the knife. I imagine it's from the collection but you better check on it. As soon as you're finished, return here."

IV

The Night of June 6th

As Mason left the room, Lieutenant Payne turned his attention on the Oriental who sat beside the red-headed girl and wondered where he placed in the puzzle. He saw before him

now a young man, probably thirty-five years of age, of medium height, and rather stockily built. His features were very dark, almost brown, with high cheek bones. There was a sparse mustache on his upper lip. His black hair was cut close to his head. He was well-dressed in a brown suit, with matching shirt and tie.

"I suppose you're the Chinese professor Lawton was expecting?" he said.

"Your pardon," the Oriental said with a pleasant smile. There was the barest trace of accent in his speech, perhaps more of a tonal inflection than a real accent. "Am neither Chinese nor professor, but merely humble scholar from Tibet."

"Don't believe that humble scholar stuff," the red-headed girl said. "He's a Tibetan lama, which means that at the age of four he was studying stuff most of us wouldn't be able to understand now."

"Who are you?" Payne asked, shifting his gaze to the girl for a moment.

"Kay Barrett. I'm a flack."

"A flack?"

"Public Relations Counsel, if you prefer the loftier title," she said. "I do publicity for The World Lecture Bureau. I might as well straighten this out while I'm at it. This gentleman is Chin Kwang Kham. When the Bureau discovered he had been asked to lecture at Harvard this next year on Tibetan Culture, we got him to come over early and make a lecture tour of the country. Cleveland is the first stop and tonight was the first of four lectures he is going to give here. Being a Tibetan lama makes him damned good copy so the office sent me along to see that he gets plenty of front page space."

"Isn't Tibet Chinese?" Payne asked, coming back to the beginning of the conversation.

"Theoretically, yes; actually, no," the Tibetan said. "We are considered part of China, although we have our own rule. Racially, we are somewhat nearer the true Mongolian strain."

"You worship those Buddhas in your country?" Payne asked, thinking of the Buddhas in the Lawton study.

"Not worship Buddhas," Chin Kham said gently. "We are Lamaists, which is version of Buddhist faith. But Buddhas are not idols. They are made to represent Buddha, founder of Buddhist faith."

"But you think a lot of them over there, huh?"

"They are of sacred value, yes."

"What are you doing here?" Payne asked.

"Mr. Lawton was kind enough to invite me to inspect his collection of Tibetan art."

"Most of that stuff in his study is from your country?"

"So I understand."

"If they're sacred, how come you people sell them to this country?"

"They were perhaps stolen," Chin Kham said. "Many persons steal such things from Tibet and China to sell collectors."

"Uh-huh. What time did you arrive here?"

"I believe it was twenty minutes before ten."

"If you were supposed to lecture tonight, how come you were able to get out here so early?"

"Mr. Lawton arranged it," the Tibetan said. "He did not want to meet me so late, so he arranged with committee that tonight I should speak only half hour."

"What time did you leave downtown Cleveland?" asked Payne.

"At eight-thirty, I believe," Chin Kham answered.

"And you didn't get here until after nine-thirty?"

"We got lost," Kay Barrett volunteered. "We drove up here in my car and neither of us is familiar with the city. So we wound up in some place called Maple Heights and finally found our way back here."

"Had you arrived when Miss Lawton found her father?"

"The butler had just shown us into the hall," Kay Barrett said.

Lieutenant Payne grunted and walked across the room to where the servants were. He came to a stop in front of Roberts, the butler.

"Where were you between nine o'clock and the time you answered the door at ten minutes to ten?"

"In the butler's pantry."

"What were you doing?"

"Reading a book, sir."

"What book?"

The butler's flabby face seemed to grow paler, if that were possible.

" 'The Criminal and Society', sir," he said.

"Why?"

"Mr. Lawton's orders, sir."

Lieutenant Payne had decided five minutes earlier who the most likely suspect was, but true to his nature he was out to collect all available facts anyway. He knew now what Roberts' complexion and way of talking, barely moving his lips, reminded him of—the state prison.

"You've been in prison, haven't you, Roberts?" he asked.

"Five years ago, sir. At Columbus, Ohio."

"What did you do?"

"Three years of a fifteen-year sentence for grand larceny. But I was—"

"I know, you were innocent," Payne interrupted. "It's none of my business whether you were innocent or guilty. Did Lawton know about your prison term?"

"Yes, sir. That's the reason he made me read every book on crime that came out and go to all lectures on crime. Then I had to give him a report of what was said. He used to call me into his study sometimes and make me show him the way prisoners had to march. He would always conclude with a lecture on crime."

For a brief moment some of the torture he must have gone through was shown on the butler's face and even Lieutenant Payne felt a wave of sympathy for him.

"You hated him, Roberts?" he asked.

"I—yes, sir."

"Why didn't you leave?"

"I was paroled, sir, and he always threatened to have me

sent back to prison if I tried to leave or if I refused to do anything he wanted me to. He would have done it, too."

"I don't doubt it," Payne said. He turned to the woman next to Roberts. She was a middle-aged woman, with gray hair. There was a faded souvenir of beauty still lingering on her face, making a last valiant stand against the inner turmoil that had aged her. She stared defiantly back at Payne.

"Who are you?" Payne asked.

"Mrs. Forbes, the housekeeper." Her voice had the acid sharpness of a frustrated woman.

"Did you hate your employer too?"

"I did," she answered, pursing her mouth grimly.

"Why did Lawton accuse you of trying to blackmail him about something that was settled fifteen years ago?" Payne asked suddenly, remembering the dictaphone record.

Her face became even grimmer. "You'll never learn from me," she said. "At least, not till after the will's read!"

"How long did you work for Mr. Lawton?"

"Nineteen years."

"Why did you keep on working if you hated him?"

"Because it would have made him too happy if I was to quit."

"Why would that have made him happy?"

"I shan't say." Her mouth closed with a snap that told Payne it would do no good to press the point.

"Where were you between nine and ten?" he asked instead.

"In the kitchen."

"Anyone with you?"

"My daughter," she answered, inclining her head towards the girl beside her.

"Both of you were there all the time between nine and ten?"

"Yes."

Lieutenant Payne looked at the girl. She was young, probably no more than sixteen, and beautiful in spite of a drab, shapeless dress and amateurishly applied make-up. He could

see that she looked like her mother, but there was a strength in her face that wasn't in Mrs. Forbes'. There was also a sullenness that already was beginning to make her look older than her years.

"What's your name?" Payne asked.

"Anne Forbes," she answered without looking up.

As he turned away from the girl, he glanced at Detective Corbett by the door. The latter nodded to indicate that he had it all down. That was the way that Payne always worked on a case. Even with preliminary, and sometimes useless, questioning, Detective Corbett would be standing somewhere in an inconspicuous corner, taking everything down in shorthand.

The door opened and Earl Mason came back into the library, carrying a sheaf of paper in his hand. There was a suppressed gleam of excitement in his eyes.

"Incidentally, Mason," Lieutenant Payne said, wanting to be sure the record was complete, "where were you between nine o'clock and twenty minutes to ten this evening?"

"In my office, going over the statements from the bank."

"Where is that?"

"Upstairs."

"You were the only person upstairs?"

"I fear I don't know anything about the whereabouts of the rest of the household," Earl Mason said.

"What brought you downstairs?"

"I glanced at my watch and saw that it was a quarter to ten. Mr. Lawton had wanted me to be present when he showed his collection to Mr. Kham, who was to have been here at nine-thirty. So I put the statements away and came downstairs. Roberts was phoning headquarters as I arrived."

"Okay," Lieutenant Payne said. "Now, did you check over everything in the study?"

"I did and there is one thing missing."

Lieutenant Payne was pleased. He had long before guessed as much and it gave him a distinct feeling of pleasure to have that guess verified.

"I thought so," he said. "Something pretty valuable, probably with a lot of history back of it, eh?

"As a matter of fact, yes," Earl Mason said, his face showing surprise at Payne's clairvoyance. "The Kum Bum Buddha is missing."

"What's that?" Payne asked.

"According to Mr. Lawton's notes," Mason said, glacing at the papers in his hand, "the Kum Bum Buddha is one of the three most renowned early Buddhist sculptures in existence. It is a laughing Buddha. It is of gold, and for over a thousand years was in a special shrine at the Kum Bum monastery in Tibet. You perhaps noticed the small building on the floor of the study?"

Lieutenant Payne nodded, remembering the gold-roofed miniature.

"That, I believe, is a reproduction of the original shrine. According to a note here, in Mr. Lawton's handwriting, the Buddha was stolen out of Tibet by two American soldiers-of-fortune, who sold it to an agent through whom Mr. Lawton often purchased Oriental goods. I believe the purchase price was near one hundred thousand dollars. This sketch is, I imagine, only a part of the history of the Buddha. Mr. Kham can undoubtedly tell you more about it. I think that was one reason he was asked to call: to supply a more complete history."

Lieutenant Payne nodded to himself again. He hadn't of course, envisioned such complete details, but the background of the missing Buddha was much as he had thought it would be.

"You're sure that it was in the study earlier?" Payne inquired.

"I recall seeing it during the afternoon," Earl Mason said. "Perhaps around four o'clock. But I'm positive that Mr. Lawton had no plans for removing it himself. He particularly wanted to show it to Mr. Kham. I believe he even sent a newspaper article, which described it in some detail, to Mr. Kham at his hotel this morning."

"Fine," Lieutenant Payne said. He turned to face the room. "I think I know who murdered Horace Lawton."

PART II

Sits the wind in that corner?
William Shakespeare.

V

Coroner's Inquest—June 9th

Lieutenant Payne had laboriously traced, for the jury, his actions after arriving at the Lawton house. His own sense of the dramatic had prompted him to conceal carefully the identity of the person upon whom his mind had logically pounced as the murderer of Horace Lawton. Having worked up to that point, he now leaned forward in his chair and prepared to reveal that suspect.

"Just a moment, Lieutenant Payne," Coroner Williams said, inwardly pleased at the look of frustration that appeared on Payne's face. "I believe that it might be well to pause at this point and call on other witnesses in order that the jury may get a more complete picture of the situation and to be better acquainted with the persons who stand a chance of being involved."

Lieutenant Payne reluctantly stepped down and seated himself in front. Coroner Williams noted with satisfaction that his interruption had been well-timed. The jury members were squirming around in their seats like a bunch of small boys who had just witnessed the last scene of the weekly installment of The Lone Ranger fade from the screen.

"Miss Elizabeth Lawton," the coroner called.

Dressed in black which set off her boyish figure and blonde hair to perfection, Miss Lawton stepped forward and was sworn to tell the truth, etc.

"You are Elizabeth Lawton, the daughter of the deceased?" Coroner Williams asked formally.

"Yes." Her voice was low, with a pleasant throatiness to it.

"More often referred to as Betty Lawton?"

"Yes."

"I realize this is of a very personal nature," the coroner said, "but I believe you are in love, in fact engaged, to Theodore Challet?"

"Yes." This time her voice was so low they could barely hear it.

"What is Mr. Challet's occupation?"

"He is a claim adjuster for the Plymouth Insurance Company, but is expecting a promotion."

"What was your father's reaction to your engagement?"

"He was quite angry about it."

Glancing over his jury with an experienced eye, the coroner saw that he had produced the right effect. They were, as befitted middle-aged men, properly sentimental about Spring and young love. They had been aroused and touched, without losing the edge of suspense from Lieutenant Payne's interrupted testimony.

"That's all for the present," Coroner Williams said. "You may step down."

He shook his head slightly as he saw Lieutenant Payne look up hopefully.

"Mr. Chin Kham," he called.

The clerk, all too aware that Chin Kham was supposed to be a Buddhist, was a little confused about the propriety of swearing him in, but finally used the Bible and was rather pleased when everything went off all right.

"Is that the correct pronunciation of your name—Kham, to rhyme with Tom?" Coroner Williams asked, looking at the Tibetan with interest.

"Yes," Chin Kham said, smiling. "Oriental names usually must be swallowed like hot soup and with somewhat similar noise, but my honorable ancestors were kindly to foreign tongues."

"You are a Buddhist, I believe?"

"Roots of my ancestors were set in Buddhism."

"You are lecturing here in Cleveland?"

"Yes."

"I'll have to come up and hear you. You heard Lieutenant Payne's testimony about this Kum Bum Buddha?"

"Yes."

"We don't want to anticipate any of Lieutenant Payne's remaining testimony," Coroner Williams said, with a sly glance in the direction of the lieutenant, "but I think it might help the jury to understand the importance of this Buddha being gone, if they knew a little bit more about it. You are familiar with it?"

"As a mother with her child," Chin Kham said.

"Is it really worth a hundred thousand dollars?"

"In Tibet, the value of Kum Bum Buddha is not stated in dollars. It contains much gold, which undoubtedly has great value, but to Tibetans it means more because of age and spiritual value. It is the work of an unknown lama who lived in Eighth Century. According to records, he spent his entire life on this one sculpture and put all his feeling for the teachings of Buddha into it."

"How come it's called the Kum Bum Buddha?"

"Only because it resides at Kum Bum, the birthplace of Tsong-kha-pa who founded section of Lamaist known in English as Yellow Hats. Only at birth of Tsong-kha-pa, it was not known as Kum Bum. It is said that Tsong-kha-pa was born into world in full possession of mature senses and with long white beard. At the age of three, his mother shaved his head and tossed the hair on the ground. From this hair, there grew up overnight a white sandalwood tree, its bark and leaves covered with many mystic Tibetan symbols. From this came name of Kum Bum, which, translated to English, means The Hundred Thousand Images. The Buddha which you call Kum Bum resides there in Jo K'ang."

"Jo K'ang?" the coroner repeated.

"Means House of the Lord Buddha," Chin Kham explained. "It is built of red and green tile, with gold roof,

and contains a throne for the Buddha."

All in all it was a good show, Coroner Williams decided, glancing at his jury. He had also noticed that the reporters were busy taking notes as Chin Kham spoke.

The only thing to blunt Coroner Williams' pleasure was the fact that Juror Number Five seemed to be getting impatient again.

"You may return to the stand, Lieutenant Payne," the coroner said.

"I believe, Lieutenant," he said, "that you had just reached the point in your statement where you were about to reveal where your early conclusions had led you."

"I remember where I was," Payne said, a trifle gruffly.

"No doubt," Williams answered. He leaned over and spoke to the stenographer. "Would you mind reading to Lieutenant Payne his last sentence?"

The stenographer found the spot and read aloud: "'I think I know who murdered Horace Lawton.'"

"Will you go on from there, Lieutenant," Coroner Williams said, knowing that his little gesture would show Payne that he was aware of the unimportance of what Payne was about to say.

VI

The Night of June 6th

If Lieutenant Payne expected his announcement that he knew the identity of the murderer to produce a noticeable reaction, he was not disappointed.

"The murderer," Lieutenant Payne continued before the suspense could lag, "is that Tibetan who calls himself Chin Kham!"

The silence that followed his charge was suddenly broken by a shriek of laughter from Kay Barrett.

"Chin," she said, "make like a Yellow Peril for the gentleman!"

"What's so funny?" growled Payne, his confidence oozing

about a million dollars! Isn't that so?"

"Not quite," Earl Mason said, staring owlishly through his glasses at the lieutenant. "I believe at the present value of gold it would come to a trifle over eight hundred thousand dollars. I understand, however, that there is only a layer of gold over the Buddha."

"The Buddha at Kum Bum is of solid gold," Chin Kham said.

For the moment, Lieutenant Payne was badly confused.

"You say you saw this Buddha in the study earlier in the afternoon?" he asked Earl Mason.

"Yes."

"How many entrances are there to this house?"

"Only two. One in the front and one at the rear."

Payne thought that over a moment and then whirled on Ted Challet.

"You say you were in the library all the time between nine and when the murder was discovered?"

"Yes sir."

"I suppose if somebody had moved a ton of Buddha out the front door, you'd have heard them?"

"I should think so," Challet said.

"And you," Payne went on, looking at Mrs. Forbes, the housekeeper, "say you were in the kitchen all that time?"

"Yes, *we* were."

"Would anybody have to go through the kitchen to get out the back way?"

"Yes."

"Well," Payne said finally, "either somebody is lying like hell, or it was taken out earlier. If it was removed in the afternoon somebody certainly would notice it. They'd have to have a truck. Was Lawton in his study all afternoon?"

"No," Earl Mason said. "He was downtown from about five until shortly after eight."

"Where were you during that time?"

"Upstairs, working, except when I came down for dinner at eight."

"Were you in the study again?"

"Not after four o'clock."

"Where were you between five and eight, Miss Lawton?"

"In my room, upstairs in the right wing."

"You, Challet?"

"In Euclid Village on a case for my company until seven-thirty."

"Roberts?"

"I was out from five to seven," the butler replied. "Then I returned and began preparing for dinner. I was in the dining room most of the time."

"But you would have heard anyone moving that Buddha out?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Mrs. Forbes?" Payne next asked.

"My daughter and I both were in the kitchen all the time —where we always are," she said bitterly.

"You weren't up front at any time?"

"No."

"Would you have heard anyone moving that Buddha out?"

"We might of and we might not. I wouldn't of stopped them if I had. I didn't hold with that collecting of heathen idols."

"We were both in our hotel," Kay Barrett said as Payne looked in her direction. "We were around the lobby most of the afternoon so there are plenty of witnesses."

"But, goddam it," the exasperated lieutenant said, "something that weighs a ton doesn't just vanish."

"Have you looked under the bed?" Kay Barrett asked.

"I suggest possible motivation," Chin Kham said, "might be that murderer knew I was to be guest here tonight and attempted to remove Buddha and Mr. Lawton so that fraud could not be discovered."

"That would sound reasonable," Payne admitted, "if you could just tell me how the hell that Buddha got out."

Chin Kham shrugged.

"How about stepping into the study, Mr. Kham, and seeing if any of that other stuff is phony."

"America is said to be friendly nation," Chin Kham said, "so would appreciate it if you called me Chin. Formality indicates lack of trust."

"Okay, Chin," Lieutenant Payne said with a grin. In spite of his earlier prejudices, he was beginning to like this Tibetan. "Come along, Mason. The rest of you stay here with Corbett."

Detective Gallo had just finished going over the last of the Buddhas for fingerprints when the three men entered.

"Find any prints?" Lieutenant Payne asked as they came in.

"Yeah," Gallo said. "Plenty of them all over the place but I'd say most of them belong to the dead man and maybe the secretary."

"Mr. Mason here was his secretary. Do you mind, Mason, if he checks your prints?"

"Not at all."

"I got a good set of different prints," Gallo went on, as he started to ink Mason's fingers, "off the handle of that knife. Perfect prints of the four fingers and part of the thumb. They don't match any of the others in here."

"Good. As soon as you finish with Mason, you might go inside and print everybody. You can start in here with Mr. Kham, if he doesn't object."

"No objection," Chin Kham said. "You might be interested, Lieutenant, to know that Chinese used fingerprints many thousand years ago to sign legal documents, as precaution against forgery."

"Yeah?" Payne said. He was looking at the empty space along the wall, which he had noticed earlier. "That must be where this Kum Bum Buddha was setting, eh, Mason?"

"Yes."

"What's that scarf on the floor?"

"I can tell you," Chin Kham answered. "It is Tibetan ceremonial scarf, known at *kata*. It is often draped around

neck of Buddha. It was probably so used by Mr. Lawton and fell off as Buddha was being removed."

"It *was* draped around the Buddha," Mason said. "Although I did not know the exact function of it."

Detective Gallo motioned Chin Kham over. Chin glanced down at the desk and caught sight of the jade medallion lying there. It was a beautiful piece, the jade a deep ocean green, covered with tiny fingers carved into it.

"Is this part of collection?" he asked Earl Mason, indicating the medallion.

"Yes," Mason said, after glancing at it.

"Lieutenant," Chin Kham said, "here is further proof of suggestion advanced by me. To think that someone would steal such bulky object as Kum Bum Buddha is to believe that they must think it real. It could not be for religious purpose since any well-informed Buddhist would know it could not be authentic. Therefore, you would say person thought it authentic and stole it for value. Yet here is object which thief could slip in pocket and is worth almost as much. And would be easier to sell."

"What's that?"

"This," Chin said, holding up the medallion. "It is worth almost any price one would put on it."

"What's so wonderful about it?" Payne asked.

"It comes from Chou dynasty, which ruled in China from 1122 to 256 B. C. Such art objects are rare."

"Why the hell would anybody take that damn Buddha then, if it's practically worthless, and leave this?"

"If I may offer one more suggestion," Chin said, as Gallo finished with him, "it is possible person knew that Buddha was not authentic and that disclosure, inevitable when shown to me, would mean ruin. Therefore, person killed Mr. Lawton and removed Buddha."

"But if he planned to kill Lawton, there wouldn't be any need of removing the Buddha."

"On the contrary. Person would hope that collection would not be checked at once and that Buddha would not be

missed until Chin Kham was far away. Therefore real motive would not come to light until later. Mind of evil person often runs in uneven pattern, much as the hunted man himself."

"Maybe," grunted Payne. "Where'd he buy the Buddha?"

"It was purchased shortly before Mr. Lawton employed me," Mason said, "but I understand that he purchased it through a dealer in New York He had three sources of purchases that I know of. One was through a Mr. Harkins whom I know and one through this dealer in New York. I imagine the name will be found among some of his papers. Mr. Lawton always dealt with him directly. The bulk of his buying was done through Mr. Philip Norton, a friend of Mr. Lawton's. For about three years now, Mr. Norton has been employed by Mr. Lawton to travel around the country and buy additional objects for the collection."

"If Lawton was an expert on this stuff, how come he fell for this fake Buddha?" Payne asked.

"Mr. Lawton was not an expert on them. He merely liked owning such articles."

"Then who the hell was an expert?" the amazed Payne asked. "You aren't and he wasn't! Did he just go around buying anything that people said was all right?"

"Mr. Norton is considered an authority on Oriental art. As I say, he supervised most purchases. Occasionally Mr. Lawton would buy something through Mr. Harkins or another dealer and when Mr. Norton returned, he would inspect it."

"How come Norton said the Buddha was genuine?"

"I don't know."

"Where is Norton?"

"In New York, at the present, I believe."

"And maybe not. Looks like we'll have to check on him."

"Perhaps," Chin Kham said, "he was fooled in spite of being expert. It would be possible if the Buddha was cleverly constructed. If the weight was right, they would accept the gold content. Such Buddhas as the one at Kum Bum are rare, and even expert would not know it from another similar Buddha unless he had been to Kum Bum and had seen it.

"Yeah," Payne said gloomily. "What about the rest of this stuff? See anything else that's phony?"

"Much of it is of no great value," Chin Kham said, "but all is authentic. It is possible that Mr. Lawton was overcharged on two of the *thangkas.*"

"The what?"

"The *thangkas.* Tapestries. It is very common for experts to sell collectors modern *thangkas* as ones which were painted in Eighth or Ninth Century."

VII
The Night of June 6th

Lieutenant Payne was silent for a moment as he thought of the job that faced him. He glared at the large bronze and iron Buddhas in the room as though hoping one of them would suddenly turn into gold and pronounce itself the missing Buddha. But none of them did, and he turned back to the two men. As he did, he saw the gold-handled knife lying on the desk, neatly tagged as Exhibit A. That reminded him of the other thing he had asked Mason to do.

"Did you take a look at this knife, Mason?" he asked.

"Yes, but I completely forgot to tell you about it, in the excitement over the missing Buddha," Mason exclaimed. "There is something quite odd about that knife."

"What?"

"It wasn't in the collection—or at least shouldn't have been."

"What do you mean?" Payne demanded.

"Perhaps I better go back a little," Mason said. "The gentleman who lives in the house next door is also a collector of Chinese art. His name is Julius Green. Until about a year ago, Mr. Lawton and Mr. Green would occasionally get together to compare notes. They were not exactly friendly. I am inclined to believe that Mr. Green disliked everything about Mr. Lawton except his hobby, and Mr. Lawton was

always contemptuous of anyone who retired, as Mr. Green had. But they both found pleasure in showing the other up in the matter of objects they had collected. I believe that Mr. Lawton usually had the edge on Mr. Green, especially after the purchase of the Kum Bum Buddha. But about a year ago, Mr. Green bought this knife, which I think they said dates to the Han dynasty. Is that correct, Mr. Kham?"

"Yes," Chin said.

"Uh-huh. Go ahead, Mason."

"The minute that Mr. Lawton saw it, he wanted to purchase it from Mr. Green. I believe he eventually offered Mr. Green eight or ten times what he had paid for it, but Mr. Green wouldn't sell it. Undoubtedly he was getting too much enjoyment from getting the better of Mr. Lawton, in addition to prizing it as a part of his own collection. Mr. Green is a wealthy man and naturally could afford to turn down any of the offers. Mr. Lawton became quite angry about it. About two months later—this is about ten months ago—Mr. Green was absent from his home one day and the servants were also away with the exception of the butler, who was gone from the house about an hour. During that hour someone broke into the house and stole the knife."

"So that's it," Lieutenant Payne muttered. He had wondered earlier about the Mr. Green mentioned in the dictaphone record. This explained it. But it also added another to the list of suspects.

"Mr. Green," Mason continued, "believed that Mr. Lawton had Roberts break in and steal it. Roberts told you about serving part of a sentence for grand larceny, but he neglected to mention that the police of Cincinnati once considered him a very skillful burglar. Mr. Green knew this from hearing Mr. Lawton speak about it, so he jumped to the conclusion that Roberts had been put to work again. He came over and accused Mr. Lawton, and there was quite a scene which ended in Mr. Lawton ordering Roberts to throw him out. Mr. Green left.

"Later that day he went to the police station and made

a charge against Mr. Lawton. I imagine you will find it on the records. Mr. Lawton countered with a civil suit for libel, for one million dollars, against Mr. Green, a charge of blackmail against Mr. Green, and a suit for false arrest against Mr. Green and the police department."

"I remember it now," Payne said, nodding. "What happened?"

"Eventually both of them agreed to drop all charges, although Mr. Green was still convinced that Mr. Lawton had the knife. Their enmity grew quite strong after that. Mr. Green resigned from all the clubs to which Mr. Lawton belonged. He also was instrumental in costing Mr. Lawton some business. Mr. Lawton retaliated by manipulating some stock in which Mr. Green was interested financially, causing Mr. Green to lose, so I understand, in the neighborhood of a quarter of a million dollars. This was as recent as two months ago. All in all, it was quite an unpleasant affair."

"And this is the knife?"

"Yes."

"How do you know? Did Lawton show it to you?"

"No, but I was in with Mr. Lawton the day Mr. Green first came over to show it. I remembered it because of the unusual handle. I doubt if there is another knife like it—at least in Cleveland."

"Uh-huh. Did Lawton have Roberts steal it?"

"I don't know. It wouldn't surprise me if he did, but I have no evidence to that effect."

"You say this Green lives next door?"

"Yes."

"Why the hell didn't you tell me all this earlier?" Payne said. "It begins to look as though Green had a pretty strong motive himself."

"And the disappearance of the Buddha?" Chin Kham asked.

"To hell with it," Lieutenant Payne said. He had just about decided that he could probably spend the rest of his life trying to find out what happened to the Buddha without

getting any closer to the solution of the murder.

"I'm going to forget that damned Buddha ever existed for the time being," he said. "All it does is get in the way. Besides, according to your idea, the Buddha is a motive and not a clue. So I'll catch the murderer first and then ask him how it was done."

"Such a philosophy has its points," admitted Chin, smiling.

"I want Gallo to get a look at this Green's prints and see if they match the ones on this knife. Come on." Lieutenant Payne picked up the exhibits from the desk and led the way back to the library.

Detective Gallo was busily taking everyone's prints as they entered. Lieutenant Payne ordered Detective Corbett to go to the house next door and bring back Julius Green.

"I feel like a shoplifter or gunmoll," Kay Barrett said, watching Gallo press her fingers to his pad. "Did the lieutenant give you the third degree, Chin?"

"No third degree," Chin said. "Short visit was most enlightening, but many times reflection of sun on snow is brighter than sun itself."

"Now what the hell does that mean?" Lieutenant Payne demanded.

"Merely ancient proverb," Chin Kham said, shrugging. "Value of proverb can only be determined after long study."

While they were talking, Gallo finished the last of the fingerprinting and retired to one corner where there was a reading lamp, to check the list against his prints from the knife. The front doorbell rang.

"I'll get it," Lieutenant Payne said as Roberts automatically started towards the hall. Payne walked swiftly out to the front door, noticing the expensive paneling on the walls, and opened it. Detective Corbett stepped inside. With him was a short, bald-headed man, whose red face wore an expression of anger.

"Are you in charge here?" he demanded, when he saw Payne. "What's the meaning of this officer dragging me out

of my house? If Lawton's trying to pull a fast one, he'll be sorry!"

"I doubt very much if Corbett *dragged* you," Payne said dryly. "You weren't expecting Lawton to pull a fast one now, were you?"

"He's capable of doing anything," the man said. "If you're driving at anything in particular, spit it out."

"You're Julius Green, aren't you?"

"Of course, of course."

"Step on into the library a minute. I want to show you something." He turned and led the way back into the library, Corbett and Green following.

"Did you ever see this before?" Lieutenant Payne asked, picking up the gold-handled knife from where he had placed it with the other exhibits.

"You found it!" exclaimed Green. "I knew he had it all the time, the old thief! I want to press the charge, officer, and see to it that he gets the limit."

"This is your knife?"

"Of course it's mine! Where did you find it?"

"In Lawton's back," Payne said slowly.

"In Lawton's back? You mean he's dead?"

If he was acting, Lieutenant Payne thought, he was damn good. But his surprise seemed genuine enough.

"Yes. Where were you between nine and ten tonight?" Payne asked.

"Oh, so you think I killed him," Green exclaimed. "God knows I hated Lawton, but I wouldn't have killed him. Ruined him, yes, if I had the chance, but there wouldn't have been enough revenge in killing him. If you catch the murderer, though, I'll pin a medal on him."

"You still haven't answered my question," Payne pointed out.

"Between nine and ten? I was home."

"Anybody see you?"

"Only my butler, at probably a quarter past nine and then again at ten-thirty. But I assure you I didn't kill him.

If you know the full story, you must know that I haven't had possession of that knife for a year now—since Lawton had his butler steal it for him after he found out he couldn't buy it."

"We'll see," Lieutenant Payne said. "Since you're innocent, you won't object to having your fingerprints taken, will you?"

"Of course I object," Green snapped. "Not that it'll do me any good!"

VIII
The Night of June 6th

"Well, I hope you're satisfied," he said a few minutes later, examining his fingertips as he rejoined Lieutenant Payne. "Personally, I don't know why anyone would bother to try to find the murderer of Lawton, anyway."

"You are also a collector of Chinese art?"

"Yes," Green said suspiciously.

"One thing is missing from the Lawton collection," Payne said, pretending to be absorbed in the task of chewing his unlighted cigar but in reality studying Green. "The Kum Bum Buddha."

"So? I suppose you think I tucked it in my pocket and walked out with it? Just goes to show what fools we taxpayers keep on the police force. The damned thing must have weighed at least a ton. It was probably a fake anyway."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because Lawton was just the kind of a guy to have a fake and try to make everybody believe it was worth a lot of dough."

"As a matter of fact it was a fake, but it's a pretty safe bet that Lawton didn't know it was. We would not have known it, if it hadn't been for Mr. Kham here."

For the first time, Julius Green seemed to notice the Tibetan.

"I was down to your lecture tonight," he said, "and it was

damn good, what there was of it. What the hell was the idea of only speaking thirty minutes?"

"I regret to say that was also the work of the late Mr. Lawton," Chin Kham answered. "He wished me to come up to see his collection but did not wish to wait too late. So he arranged for committee to cut lecture short."

"Just like him! If the politicians had anything to do with it Lawton would have arranged to have the sun change its orbit for his benefit."

Lieutenant Payne took the opportunity to glance across at Gallo who had started checking on Green's fingerprints as soon as he had finished taking them. Gallo shook his head and a wave of disappointment fled across Payne's face.

"Your prints don't match the ones we have," he told Green bluntly, "but I'm still not sure you're in the clear. You had about as much motivation as anyone. You felt that Lawton had stolen your knife and then more recently he caused you to lose a lot of money."

"So you know about that, eh? But you're wrong about the knife. I didn't 'feel' he took it; I knew damn well he did."

"I won't question you any more tonight," Payne went on, "but you can expect to be called to the inquest."

"It looks to me like you're trying to make a hell of a lot out of a simple incident," Green said. "No two-cent cop's going to order me around. I'll see the Safety Director."

Lieutenant Payne's face flushed.

"I've been threatened by bigger guys than you and I'm still on the force," he said. "In the meantime I'm still in charge of this case and you'll be at the inquest if we have to drag you there in handcuffs!"

Green looked at him a moment and then suddenly grinned.

"That's more like it," he said in a friendly tone. "I like to see a cop that can't be shoved around by money. Don't pay any attention to me. I even annoy myself sometimes. When do I get my knife back?"

"Not until after the inquest," Payne answered weakly.

"Can I go now?"

"Yes."

"All right. But I'm warning you, you better take good care of that knife. If anything happens to it, I'll sue the city. And I'll run you out of town!"

Julius Green glared at Lieutenant Payne once more and then turned and marched stiffly out of the room. He slammed the front door with a bang that shook the whole house.

"I can imagine," Lieutenant Payne remarked, wiping his brow with his handkerchief, "what it must have been like when Lawton and that guy got together!"

"If you ask me," Kay Barrett said, "this guy just barks loud because he likes the sound of it."

"Don't you quote proverbs at me," Payne snapped. "I've about got my fill of this damned case. Two thousand pound idols flying out the window, irritable old men, stolen knives from China, a damned convict and, by God, one proverb shouter is enough."

"I'll bet you beat your wife," Kay answered.

Payne looked at his thoroughly-mangled cigar, once more looked in vain for an ashtray, and finally tucked it back in a vest pocket. Despite his determination to forget about the vanishing Buddha, the thought of it kept popping up to plague him.

"Miss Lawton," he said suddenly, "do you know where this Philip Norton is?"

"Uncle Phil," she exclaimed. "I think he's in New York. I suppose I should send him a wire."

"He's your uncle?" Payne asked in some surprise.

"No, but I've always called him Uncle Phil. He's a dear. I think he and my father went to school together or something. He went to work for father a few years ago when he lost his own business. Uncle Phil is the only person my father ever seemed to like and he always seemed to like father."

Thank God somebody liked him, thought Lieutenant Payne. Aloud, he said: "You're sure he's in New York?"

"Of course. I heard Earl say just today that Father had received a letter from Uncle Phil in the morning mail."

Payne glanced at his watch, saw it was already midnight and again looked to Gallo. The detective motioned to him, and Payne could tell by the expression on his face that he had discovered something. He walked across the room and looked over Gallo's shoulder. The detective was holding two sets of prints side by side. One was labeled *Prints from knife* and the other bore a name. They were identical.

His face expressionless, Lieutenant Payne walked back and faced the room. Actually he felt very little exultation at the discovery because the problem of the Buddha still bothered him and the new angle didn't shed any light on it.

"Miss Lawton," Lieutenant Payne said, "you said that it was approximately nine-fifteen when you left your father's study?"

"Yes." Her voice was low and, without looking, she had found Ted Challet's hand and was gripping it until her knuckles were white.

"You went directly from the study to your room upstairs?"

"Yes."

"That would take you how long?"

"I don't know, perhaps less than a minute."

"And you were there until nine-thirty?"

"I think so. I don't know exactly but it was about nine-thirty when I came back."

"You rejoined Mr. Challet in the library at that time?"

"Yes."

"Then you discovered the loss of your clip?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you leave her alone?" Ted Challet demanded suddenly, jumping nervously to his feet. "Hasn't she had enough to go through tonight? Why don't you pick on me if you must badger somebody?"

"All right, I will," Lieutenant Payne said in the same tone of voice. "You were here in the library all the time?"

"I was."

"You can verify the fact that Miss Lawton left at some

time before nine-fifteen, returned at about nine-thirty and then left to look for her clip at twenty to ten?"

"Yes."

"Can you also verify that she was upstairs between nine-fifteen and nine-thirty?"

"I can."

"How?" Payne snapped quickly. "According to your earlier statement, you weren't outside of this room. Were you able to see through the walls?"

"I—that is, I did happen to look out at about nine-fifteen and saw her going upstairs."

"Oh, you just *happened* to look out at just the exact time she was going upstairs. Quite a coincidence, wasn't it?"

Ted Challet's face was a dead-white and there was no doubt this time that it was from fear. His eyes shifted around the room as though looking for a way out.

"I—I was wondering what was keeping her," he said desperately, "and I looked out into the hall to see if she was coming. Instead I saw her going up the stairs."

"That was fine!" Lieutenant Payne said sarcastically. "Isn't the truth of the matter that you were out in the hall when she started to leave her father's study and ducked back in so she wouldn't see you? Weren't you out in the hall listening to the entire conversation between Miss Lawton and her father? Didn't you go out into the hall for that purpose?"

"No, I didn't hear what they were saying and I didn't try to," Challet said indignantly.

"Then you were in the hall?"

"Y-yes, just for a moment. But I didn't duck back in because I saw her coming. I was just going back when I saw her leave the study. I saw she was upset so I didn't go to meet her."

"Very considerate of you! Then as soon as you saw she was safely upstairs, I suppose you went back into the library and patiently waited for her to come?"

"Yes."

"You probably even read a book and relaxed in one of the

easy chairs?"

Ted Challet stared back at the lieutenant with mingled fear and anger in his tired eyes.

"Isn't the truth of the matter," Payne continued ruthlessly, "that you followed her out into the hall deliberately to overhear the conversation with her father? There, you heard her father say that if she married you he would cut her off without a cent. You saw the chances of eventually getting the Lawton millions slipping out of your grasp. Oh, I don't doubt that you love the girl. But that wouldn't keep you from wanting the money.

"As Miss Lawton started to come out of the study, you ran back up the hall and ducked into the library so she wouldn't know you had been listening. Something had to be done, you kept telling yourself over and over. Then you saw that she wasn't coming straight into the library; that she was going upstairs instead. You thought you saw a way out. You started grimly down the hall towards the study."

"No!" Betty Lawton cried, springing to her feet. "How can you stand there and say such things? Don't you see that Ted wouldn't do such a thing—couldn't do it?"

"I know this is tough on you, Miss Lawton," Lieutenant Payne said gently. "But even if you didn't love your father, you certainly wouldn't want to marry his murderer."

Betty Lawton dropped back into her chair. She made no sound but it was worse than if she had sobbed hysterically.

"You probably didn't intend to kill him when you entered," Payne went on, looking at Challet again, "but then he grew insulting as only Horace Lawton could. This knife was lying on the desk and you grabbed it up and plunged it into his back! Isn't that what happened?"

"The knife wasn't—" began Challet woodenly, breaking off suddenly as he realized what he was saying.

"It wasn't on the desk? Is that what you were going to say?" the lieutenant pressed. "Then it was somewhere else and you took it along with the idea of plunging it in his back. Maybe you didn't even give him a chance to see you. In fact

that's probably the way it happened, since he was dictating when he got it. Then you slipped quickly back to the library and were here when Miss Lawton returned. Probably when she mentioned that her clip was gone, you suggested that she look for it in the study, so she would discover the body. You probably also saw to it that she noticed the time. It was a very clever scheme, Challet, but there was one thing you forgot."

Ted Challet stared silently at the wall above Lieutenant Payne's head.

"You forgot to wipe your fingerprints from the knife," Lieutenant Payne said.

The room was silent for the moment. Betty Lawton still sat in the chair, shaking with silent sobs.

"There's nothing dumber in the world than a dumb cop!" Kay Barrett said scornfully. She walked over and put her arm around Betty Lawton's shoulders. "Don't worry, darling. That big lug is just talking to cover up the fact that he doesn't know what the hell is going on."

"Come on, Challet," Lieutenant Payne said gruffly. "I'll have to hold you for the inquest on Monday."

PART III

He that dies pays all debts.
William Shakespeare.

IX

The Morning of June 9th

Chin Kham was already having breakfast in the hotel dining room when Kay came downstairs. A letter lay beside his coffee cup, but he merely said good morning and made no mention of it, despite her curious glances in that direction. Kay finished her roll, lit a cigarette and blew a puff of smoke at the envelope.

"So you're going to play hard to get," she said. "The strong, silent Oriental! I know there's something important

in that envelope or you wouldn't have left it out there to wave like a red flag in front of my eyes. What's cooking?"

"I was merely being polite," Chin said, smiling, "and withholding business until morning meal was finished. This is slight evidence to uphold thought that love-sick youth is not guilty of murder."

"What is it, a confession?"

"In a way, yes, but unfortunately sender neglected to sign correct name. You may read it."

"Now, that's mighty nice of you, pard," Kay said, as Chin withdrew the sheet of paper and handed it to her. She unfolded it and looked at the typewritten message on it.

Kham, Pakkhandin:
Suptam vyâghram mahaugho vâ mrityur âdâya gakkhati,
Samkinvânakam evainam kâmânâm avitriptikam.
Makkurâga.

"What kind of double talk is this?" Kay demanded.

"That," he said, "is, with the exception of my name at the top, the language of Pali, a tongue which originated from Sanskrit. It is used almost entirely in Tibet now and the Burmese Buddhists also use it. I learned it while quite small."

"I don't want your autobiography," Kay said. "I want to know what it means."

"To begin with," Chin said, "the word right after my name at the top means 'one who meddles in other people's business.' In other words, the greeting is 'Kham, Meddler.' The next two lines say, 'As a stream carries off a sleeping tiger, death carries off this man who is gathering flowers, and who is not satiated in his pleasures.' The signature is 'King of Death.'

"The main body of message is ancient Tibetan proverb which is usually thought of in more peaceful light. But the addition of other word to my name and signature would suggest that someone is displeased with my interest in vanishing Buddha."

"Once it's translated, even I can get the meaning," Kay said. "In English it might not be so fancy, but it couldn't be

much more to the point. What do you make of it?"

"It upholds thought of innocence of Challet," Chin said. "Even if he gave to others to mail, I doubt if he knows Pali. Also person who sent this token must be well versed in Oriental proverbs, knowing that words take on different meanings in use. In usual use of proverb 'gathering flowers' means pleasures of life, but in present use means gathering of knowledge. Idle thoughts on subject show two possibilities. One is that threat is meant to serve as authentic warning because murderer believes that I possess knowledge which is harmful to his cause. This implies that some idle thought of mine has more value than I have given it. Perhaps I should examine them with more critical eye.

"Other possibility is that murderer is well-trained in Pali language and Tibetan philosophy but that no one knows this. Therefore, he does not think I represent danger to him but wishes to be sure by having my attention placed elsewhere. He writes note which causes thoughts to fall into certain channels which are far away from correct point. Mind that plans crime must follow a tortuous path."

"I don't get the last point," Kay said. "You slipped that one over a little too fast for me. Where would he want to direct your attention?"

"Of all suspects in murder of Mr. Lawton," Chin Kham said, "there are only two who have fished deeply enough in Oriental sea to come up with Pali language. We do not know that they are familiar with it, but they are only ones who might logically know the language. They are Julius Green and Philip Norton."

"But Green wouldn't—"

"It is best," Chin interrupted, "to erase from mind all thoughts which do not spring directly from crime itself. As with others, Mr. Green did not have any satisfactory explanation of his actions during time in which murderer was active. It is easy to say one was home when in need of alibi. But do not forget that matter of missing knife was not only grounds upon which Mr. Green disliked Mr. Lawton. There is also

matter of quarter of a million dollars. The fact that he has long been interested in Tibetan and Chinese art means that possibly he may have learned the languages."

"What about Norton?"

"There are many questions about Mr. Norton. We do not have proof he was in New York at time of murder, so he cannot be eliminated as suspect. Trip by train from New York to Cleveland takes only twelve hours. Mr. Norton also has been interested many years in the Orient and perhaps has learned Pali. Consideration of missing Buddha at this point only serves to tip scales more towards Mr. Norton."

"How?"

"Remember," Chin Kham said thoughtfully, "that missing Buddha was purchased five years ago. Mr. Mason was not yet in the employ of Mr. Lawton, which seems to remove him from sphere of that transaction. Mr. Challet had not yet moved into sight, so far as we know, so he seems to be eliminated. Mr. Green was then on very good terms with Mr. Lawton and it is doubtful if he would have perpetrated fraud since it gave Mr. Lawton slight moral edge in their little rivalry. It does not seem likely that it was the work of Mrs. Forbes, her daughter, Roberts or Miss Lawton. This leaves us Mr. Norton.

"It is well to remember that Mr. Norton has known Mr. Lawton longer than anyone else. Therefore he would be in position to know what Mr. Lawton would like in way of art objects. Mr. Norton is also in New York and apparently acquainted with Mr. Lee who sold the Buddha. It is also Mr. Norton who discovers that Mr. Lee is missing at just the time there is interest in him. It is again Mr. Norton who stands to lose valuable job when Buddha is discovered not to be authentic—if Mr. Norton had hand in the selling of it. Mr. Norton has many things to explain before he can face world with clean face."

"But, granting that it's one of those two, what the devil have you learned that would bring out this note of warning?"

"The answer to that is to be strongly wished. It is possible that I made some remark yesterday which Miss Lawton later innocently repeated . . ." Chin Kham's voice trailed off and he stared thoughtfully into his coffee cup.

"Now what?" Kay said.

"Perhaps we were too hasty in eliminating Miss Lawton," Chin said.

"Nonsense!"

"She might be involved more than we have thought, but the thing that just occurred to me is that one she loves is in jail. Under such circumstances it is not impossible that she prevailed upon Uncle Phil to write this note in hope that presentation of it to police would assist in the removal of Mr. Challet from jail," Chin remarked, rising from the table.

"Where are you going?" Kay asked.

"I thought of going to Cleveland Heights and seeing Lieutenant Payne."

"I'm going along." Mr. Norton returned to Cleveland last night and Lieutenant undoubtedly saw him. I am curious about result of such meeting."

"No," Chin said, shaking his head. "Even the great Buddha said that a woman's place is in the home. You may amuse yourself by giving self Tibetan hairdress. You do your hair up in one hundred and eight braids, as suggested by the one hundred and eight volumes of the Kangyur, and by then it will be time to appear at inquest. Woman who is thus occupied has no time to reflect on weakness of man."

"You and your corny proverbs!" Kay said scornfully. "Why shouldn't I go?"

"I believe that Lieutenant Payne is upset by beauty and annoyed by laughter. Therefore masculine and philosophical approach may result in more successful visit. I will see you at inquest."

Some thirty minutes later a taxi deposited Chin Kham in front of the Cleveland Heights Police Headquarters. Inside, he was directed to Lieutenant Payne's office.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Kham," Lieutenant Payne said. "Come

on in. What's on your mind? Been snooping a little on this case?"

"No snooping," Chin said. "Morning mail deposited most interesting message at my door. I have come to place it in your hands."

He drew the letter from his pocket and handed it to Lieutenant Payne. The latter took out the sheet of paper and spread it open.

"What the hell?" he exclaimed as he caught sight of it. "What kind of gibberish is this?"

Chin translated the message as he had for Kay.

"What's the idea of warning you to keep out of this?" Payne asked when Chin had finished. "Have you learned something new on the case?"

"Not that I am aware of," Chin said. "Perhaps some idle suggestion has been taken to represent great knowledge, but if any such knowledge exists in my mind it has not yet made itself known to me. But message would seem to indicate one thing: that Mr. Challet is perhaps not so guilty as he appears."

"Frankly, Chin," Lieutenant Payne said, looking at the envelope, "just between you and me, I ain't so sure that this Challet guy is guilty."

"Has he offered any explanation of how fingerprints were placed on knife?"

"Not a single explanation, which is funny. If he was guilty, he'd probably have a dozen. I've got a feeling that he's afraid his explanation would be unbelievable. Maybe it'll come out at the inquest. What do you think of this note?"

"On surface it would seem to indicate that either Mr. Green or Mr. Norton is guilty, with Mr. Norton possibly stronger candidate. But there is also possibility that we are supposed to believe this, which brings up thought that there is someone else interested in the Orient who has not exposed this interest."

"One thing is made easier, though," Payne said. "Our suspects are not scattered all over the city. We can search

through the Lawton and Green houses and Challet's room for the typewriter on which this was written. That won't take long. It'll need special keys on it, so we can spot it easy. There won't be time to do it before the inquest, but we can do it afterwards."

"Did you ever purchase a typewriter?" Chin asked.

"No. What's that got to do with it?"

"If a person entered during busy moment, or was fussy enough to make salesman seek respite at other end of store, it would be simple matter to type a short message and address envelope on store machine without anyone being wiser. I believe that intelligent man would choose such a course to make sure of not being traced so easily."

"I believe you've got something there," Lieutenant Payne said. His opinion of this Tibetan's own intelligence was going up. Not only did he hit upon logical angles to develop but he came with his offerings to the police, without trying to follow them up himself.

"As soon as the inquest adjourns," Payne went on, "you and I will start making the rounds of typewriter stores. It shouldn't be too big a job since, following your reasoning, the person who wrote the note probably wouldn't go to a small store. They'd be more apt to remember him. You know, there's so many Tibetan angles to this case, I'll appreciate it if you'll sort of work with me on it—unofficially, of course."

"Only too happy to render poor aid," Chin said.

"In the meantime," Payne said, "I think it might be wiser if we omitted all mention of this note at the inquest today. Another day won't mean very much to young Challet but it might help trace this thing down. And Challet would still have to explain his fingerprints. Miss Lawton could have sent this. But if we don't mention the note, maybe we can get a new line on some of the suspects."

"That is a good suggestion," Chin agreed. "You have seen Mr. Norton?"

"Yeah, I saw Norton last night. He said something about wanting to take a look at Lawton's art list."

"There are also missing hours in schedule of Mr. Norton."

"I caught that, too," Payne said. "I asked Norton about it. He said that he had left his hotel early Saturday morning before the telegram from Miss Lawton arrived and that he didn't return until late that night. Then he was tired and decided to wait over until morning. He claimed he was out trying to buy something for Lawton, some statue he called Chen something."

"Chen-re-zi?"

"That was it."

"Chen-re-zi is Tibetan figure possessing many heads and many arms. If authentic, would be valuable addition to any collection."

"Well, that was his story," Payne said, glancing at his watch. "It's time to go down to the inquest. Want to ride with me?"

"I would consider it an honor," Chin said gravely.

X

Coroner's Inquest—June 9th

As Lieutenant Payne carefully explained his reconstruction of how Ted Challet might have committed the murder, and told of finding Challet's fingerprints on the knife handle, Coroner Williams just as carefully watched the jury to see what effect the testimony was having on them. He was pleased to note that they weren't putting too much faith in Payne's logic. The only exception was Juror Number Five, who kept glancing with obvious disapproval to where Ted Challet and Betty Lawton sat side by side. Whenever they touched hands for a moment, which was quite often, he would frown. Juror Number Five, the coroner could see, had no poetry in his soul.

As Lieutenant Payne finished his testimony and returned to his seat, Coroner Williams surveyed his witnesses. He hadn't decided just who should be questioned next. He considered Mrs. Forbes, who he felt could be forced to divulge

some information that would help to discount the evidence against Challet, and Philip Norton, about whom Coroner Williams was curious. Torn between the two, the coroner hesitated and finally succumbed to curiosity.

"Mr. Philip Norton," he called.

A tall, lean, sandy-haired man rose from his seat and was sworn in. Just as people like Lawton and Juror Number Five immediately inspired dislike, so there were others who were likable at a glance. Philip Norton belonged to the latter group. His thin face was neither homely nor handsome, yet there was an expression about it that appealed to both men and women.

"You are Philip Norton?" Coroner Williams asked as Norton seated himself in the witness chair.

"Yes."

"You have been employed by the deceased, Horace Bailey Lawton, in the capacity of an expert on Oriental art objects?"

"Something like that," Norton admitted.

"I see. How long have you worked in that capacity?"

"About three years."

"But you were acquainted with the deceased before that?"

"Yes, I had known him for thirty years."

"In most cases of murder, and particularly in this one, where the identity of the murderer is not known, it is to be expected that there will be some interest in how the deceased was regarded by his fellow men. You have already heard some testimony on this subject, much of it unpleasant in nature. Will you tell the jury how you regarded the deceased?"

"I liked him," Philip Norton said, as though unaware that he was creating a bigger sensation than if he had just confessed to murdering Lawton.

"Since this attitude is quite different from that of the majority of those who knew the deceased, I think it's proper to ask why?"

"I am fully aware how most people regarded Horace," Philip Norton said, "and I hope you will not misunderstand my attitude. I did not approve of his way of dealing with

people. I believe that the hate most people felt for him was entirely justified. Under like circumstances, I would probably have felt the same. But ever since I first met Horace Lawton thirty years ago he always treated me in a friendly fashion. Many times he extended much-needed help to me when more humanitarian men had refused. Three years ago, when my business in New York failed, he insisted that I go to work for him, and gave me a salary far larger than I deserved. He refused to make it lower in spite of my protests. In thirty years, Horace Lawton was never anything but a generous friend."

"Did he know that you disapproved of his methods?"

"Yes. I told him many times. Whenever I mentioned it, he agreed with me—but never changed."

"Were you aware of the way he treated his daughter, Elizabeth?"

"Yes," Norton said with a glance towards Betty Lawton. "That was one of the things I used to mention to him the most frequently. As always, he'd say that I was right and then continue in the same way. I believe there must have been something in his childhood that psychologically compelled him to bully people the way he did. Don't misunderstand me; I'm not trying to excuse his actions, but only to understand them."

"Of course," Coroner Williams said. "You heard mention of this Kum Bum Buddha in the testimony of Lieutenant Payne. You have seen it?

"Several times during the past five years."

"You never suspected that it was not authentic?"

"No. The outside of it was gold and the appearance was such that it seemed to fit in with the period in which it was supposed to have been made, so I took it for granted that it was authentic. I had not seen the original, never having been in Tibet. Although I once studied the language of the country, with the idea of making a trip there, I was not aware of the difficulties involved in anyone stealing it. Many valuable objects have been stolen from China and sold

to collectors, so the story seemed likely. The purchase of such stolen objects was another thing that I objected to, but Horace did as he pleased."

"Do you know through whom the deceased purchased that particular Buddha?"

"Yes, I do. It was bought from Edgar Lee, an established Oriental art dealer in New York City. That is, he was an established art dealer."

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Norton?"

"Only recently I went around to see him and discovered that he had either moved or gone out of business. Since I was unable to find any trace of him, I am inclined to believe it's the latter. The discovery that the Kum Bum Buddha was not authentic possibly also throws light on the subject."

"How recently was it that you tried to locate this dealer?"

"Two or three months ago, I should say."

"When had you seen him last?"

"Before I went to work for Horace, possibly four and a half years ago."

"Then he could have skipped out shortly after selling the Buddha to the deceased?"

"Yes."

"What was Edgar Lee's reputation?"

"Average. But since Horace paid a hundred thousand dollars for the Buddha, that would be enough for many an honest art dealer to succumb and then retire with the proceeds."

Coroner Williams had high hopes of blasting the set look from the face of Juror Number Five with his next witness. He grinned to himself as he glanced over the room.

"Mrs. Bertha Forbes," he called.

The housekeeper, wearing a shabby black silk dress, was sworn in and seated herself in the witness chair. There was suspicion in her eyes as she stared defiantly at the coroner.

"You are Mrs. Bertha Forbes?"

"I am." As soon as she finished speaking, Mrs. Forbes shut her mouth tightly as though to keep any extra words

from leaking out.

"You were employed as the housekeeper in the home of Horace Bailey Lawton?"

"I was."

"For how long?"

"The past nineteen years."

"Then you went to work there before Mrs. Lawton died?"

"Yes."

"I believe she died about eighteen years ago?"

"Yes."

"I believe your daughter also works there as a maid?"

"Yes."

"What is her name?"

"Anne Forbes."

"How old is she?"

"Sixteen." Mrs. Forbes was watching the coroner as a mouse watches a cat.

"Are you separated from Mr. Forbes or is he dead?"

"He's dead."

"How long has Mr. Forbes been dead?"

"Twenty-one years," Mrs. Forbes said, staring stonily over the heads of the spectators.

Coroner Williams hesitated a moment to let this statement be fully absorbed by his jury.

"Your husband has been dead twenty-one years and your daughter is sixteen years old?"

"Yes."

"Horace Bailey Lawton," Coroner Williams said impressively, "was the father of your daughter who goes under the name of Anne Forbes, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

Any lethargy that might have descended upon the jury had suddenly vanished. Down in the press row, the reporters were rapidly making notes.

"That is the reason that Horace Bailey Lawton made the remark, in dictating to his secretary, that you were attempting to blackmail him? You were trying to get him to publicly

recognize his daughter by you?"

"Yes."

"Is that what he also meant by saying that the whole thing had been settled fifteen years ago?"

"No," Mrs. Forbes said.

This wasn't the answer that the coroner had expected.

"What did he mean by that statement?" he asked.

"He meant about our marriage."

"Your marriage?" the astonished coroner asked.

She nodded vigorously.

"We was married almost seventeen years ago," she said. "We went down to West Virginia and was married. But when we came back, he made me keep on as the housekeeper. He never let me meet any of his friends and he threatened me if I should ever tell anybody, even his little girl, that I was married to him. And he kept on treating me like I was still his servant instead of his wife.

"Then after we was married two years, he came in one day with a paper he wanted me to sign. For the first time he acted like I was a human being again and explained the paper so good that I didn't even read it. I signed it like he wanted me to. A couple days later he came back and told me that he'd got a divorce in West Virginia where we was married. That paper I had signed had been agreeing to the divorce and also agreeing that me and the baby would never use his name and that we had no claim on him at all. Oh, him and his slick lawyers put it over all right."

"I am sorry it has been necessary to subject you to this ordeal, Mrs. Forbes," Coroner Williams said, and meant it. "You may step down now."

As Mrs. Forbes regained her chair, Betty Lawton reached over and patted her on the shoulder. For a moment the housekeeper sat there as stiffly as ever, then a little warmth crept into her face.

XI

The Afternoon of June 9th

Shortly after the startling testimony of Mrs. Forbes, Coroner Williams adjourned the inquest. Lieutenant Payne and Chin Kham were the first ones out of the building. They climbed into the police car and drove away, apparently failing to see Kay Barrett who had tried in vain to catch them.

They were both silent as Lieutenant Payne drove up Ninth Street and parked near Euclid Avenue.

They walked into a typewriter store and, after Lieutenant Payne identified himself, began checking the typewriters that were on display. A few minutes later they came out, having drawn a blank.

"It is strange," Chin Kham said, "how character and personality of murdered man still remains so evident through hatred which people felt for him and through dictaphone record. The record itself is like huge book written about man. In it you can see entire life. Mr. Lawton must have been very unhappy man."

"He made plenty of others unhappy, too."

"True. As rule, man who makes others unhappy, is unhappy himself. Man who is happy desires only to spread his happiness among others. There is one thing about which I am curious. On dictaphone record is statement concerning change in will which was not yet made. Is evidence on record sufficient to still alter terms of will?"

"Sure," Payne said. "That can be admitted as his last will and testament. Although Lawton didn't mean it to, it will probably cut out any other small bequests he made in the first will."

"Then if Miss Lawton follows her heart, she will not inherit any of that money?"

"No, it'll go to set up that Tibetan course at Western Reserve if she marries Challet and stays married to him. That's granting, of course, that they both come out of this with a clean bill of health."

"So," Chin continued thoughtfully, "even after death, Mr. Lawton continues to make people unhappy. Being young, Miss Lawton and Mr. Challet are content to be scornful of possession of money, but they will regret its absence in later years. It is too bad. There exists no way to change situation?"

"Not unless you take a hammer and smash the record, and the coroner might object to that."

"That is possibly only solution, since record has no mind to be impressed by arguments in favor of change. But it is unfortunate."

"I guess they're not the only ones who'll be unhappy over that record. Don't forget the other passages in it."

"Perhaps some kind fate will yet step in to save those who are threatened by this record," Chin observed.

"If it does, it'll have to step on the record," Lieutenant Payne said dryly. "Let's try this one."

They entered another typewriter store but with no more luck than at the last one. The same was true of their third stop.

"You noticed," Chin asked as they came out of the third store, "that Mr. Norton made reference to knowing 'the language' of Tibet?"

"Yeah, I was wondering about that."

"Strangely enough, it does not clear up our exact information needs. He neglected to state which language he knew. He may have meant Pali, Tibetan, Himalaya Tibetan, Sanskrit, North Assamese, Bodo, Naga, Kachin, Kuki-chin, Burman or Lo-lo. All but Pali and Sanskrit, which are used in much Tibetan writings, are of Tibeto-Burman group."

"My God," Lieutenant Payne said, "you mean to tell me all those are languages?"

"Oh yes, but Pali is what is known as dead language, although it is found in many Tibetan religious and literary books. That is reason why I say person who wrote note must be very familiar with Tibet. Only student of Tibet—or person who knows it by experience—would be apt to know Pali.

Since none of suspects seem to be scholars in this sense of word, conclusion is that they belong to latter group."

"How the hell is an ordinary American cop supposed to know about all those things?" demanded Payne.

"I am curious," confessed Chin, "to know just why Mr. Norton mentioned his knowledge of some Tibetan language. Perhaps I am attaching undue importance to it, but unsolicited mention invokes thought of motive back of it."

"Maybe he either sent the note or knows about it, and figured that sooner or later there's going to be questions about who knows this Pali, so he's bringing the fact out now. Then we can't suspect him of trying to hide his knowledge. Everything open and above-board."

"I had thought of that. While unsatisfactory, it appears to be only solution, unless we ascribe complete innocence to Mr. Norton and consider remark mere coincidence."

"Uh-huh," Payne said, turning into an arcade. "We'll try this store in the Old Arcade next."

Once more Lieutenant Payne identified himself and he and Chin started examining typewriters. This time they were lucky. The third machine that Lieutenant Payne tried turned out to be the one they sought. He ripped the sheet of paper from the machine and studied it closely, comparing it with the note. It was undoubtedly the same. There was one letter that was set slightly askew on the bar and this appeared on the original and the copy. And it had the special keys with the accent marks. Payne motioned Chin over to show him, and then they found the manager.

"Call your salesmen together," Lieutenant Payne said. "I want to describe some people and see if any of them remember seeing one of these people in the store this morning."

There were only three salesmen in the store, and a moment later they were facing Lieutenant Payne.

"The first guy," Payne said, after the manager had explained what was wanted, "is short, sort of fat, and wears expensive suits in dark colors. He is red-faced and bald. Very brusque in manner and would probably act as if he

owned the store."

There was no response from the three men in answer to the description of Julius Green.

"How about this one then?" Payne said. "He's tall, about six feet, I'd say, and pretty slim. Has a lean face, hollow cheeks, light complexion, and sandy hair. Is about fifty years old but could be younger from outward appearance. Stoops slightly. Probably dressed in brown and speaks very politely."

"I remember him," one of the young clerks said. "He was in here this morning just before ten. I offered to help him but he said he didn't want to buy now, but just wanted to look around at a few of the machines. I started to show them to him but he said he'd rather look by himself. I sized him up then as somebody with time to kill who didn't want to buy a machine at all. I noticed him at two or three machines, typing a few words at one and then moving on to another."

Lieutenant Payne and Chin exchange glances. The description had been that of Philip Norton.

"Did he stay longer at that machine over there than any of the others?"

"I'm not sure," the salesman said. "He could have. But I got a customer and when I was through he was gone."

"Okay, thanks," Payne said. He folded the paper he had been typing on and placed it in his pocket together with the original letter. He thanked the manager again and they left.

"We might as well stop in at the Messenger Service office," he said when they were out on the street once more, "and check the description with them. It's only a block from here. Then we'll pick up Norton."

"As trail grows warmer," Chin said thoughtfully, "my convictions grow colder. Fitting our note to description was almost too easy. And I am reminded that there is still puzzle of missing Buddha."

"Nonsense!" Payne said. "You're just pessimistic. Norton will probably explain that missing Buddha when we get a confession out of him and it'll be so simple we'll kick our-

selves for not getting it sooner. You'll see."

The manager of the messenger service was just getting ready to go home as they arrived. Lieutenant Payne identified himself and the manager stepped back into the shop.

"We would like to check the description of a man who we believe sent a letter by messenger from here this morning, if it's at all possible," Lieutenant Payne said.

"That may be difficult," the manager said, "since there are so many people come in here every day. At about what time was the delivery made?"

Lieutenant Payne glanced at Chin.

"The desk clerk said the message was left there at about ten-thirty," Chin said.

"Miss Kline was on duty then," the manager said. "Miss Kline, will you come here a moment please?"

A slender, dark-haired girl came over.

"This gentleman is from the police, Miss Kline, and he wishes to get some information. Cooperate with him completely."

"Sometime this morning between ten and ten-thirty," Payne said to the girl, "someone came in here and had a letter delivered to the Cleveland Hotel. I wonder if you'd remember the person who had it sent."

"I doubt it. There's so many of them come in and out. Who was this letter sent to?"

"Mr. Chin Kham, at the Cleveland Hotel."

"Oh, I remember that! The name was sort of unusual, you know, and the hotel is only a few blocks from here. I thought maybe the fellow was a stranger in town so I told him the hotel was so close he could take it over himself in three minutes, but he insisted on having it sent."

"Good. Was the man who sent it a tall, thin man with sandy hair?"

"Goodness, no! He was a little short fellow. I don't know what kind of hair he had because he had a cap on. But he was short, and I think kind of heavy. He was wearing overalls, I remember."

"A short man wearing overalls!" exclaimed Lieutenant Payne. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I am. I remembered him because the name on the envelope was unusual and on account of the hotel being so close."

"Wasn't there anything you could identify him by? Did he wear glasses? Or maybe there was a scar on his face?"

"No, nothing like that," the girl said, shaking her head. "I would have remembered that. He was just sort of good-looking."

"A fine thing!" Payne said as they walked to the police car. "We go around looking for a short, good-looking man in overalls! Well, maybe we won't need to look for him—if Norton hasn't run out. He probably got some truck driver to take it in, anyway, figuring we might check back to the messenger service."

Lieutenant Payne headed uptown, opened the siren and stepped on the gas. It seemed to Chin that the town was nothing but a blur of buildings, and then the police car was braking in front of the Lawton house.

Roberts answered the doorbell, his face pastier-looking than usual. He seemed startled at the sight of them.

"Where's Norton?" Payne demanded.

"I was just about to call you, sir," Roberts said. "Mr. Norton has been killed, sir."

PART IV

The tongues of dying men enforce
attention like deep harmony.
—*William Shakespeare.*

XII

Coroner's Inquest—June 10th

The jury settled in their seats, each face displaying a comfortable frame of mind, with the exception of Juror Number Five, who was frowning as he looked around the room.

Coroner Williams sighed heavily as he looked at the offending juror and prepared to open the inquest.

"It is unusual," he said, addressing the jury, "to stop the proceedings of inquiry into the death of a man to hear the details of another, and later, murder. But in this instance the evidence points to a close connection between the two murders, if not indicating that both were committed by the same hand. Therefore, I am calling Lieutenant John Payne to the stand to tell you of events which transpired last evening after this inquest was adjourned. Lieutenant Payne!"

The broad-shouldered lieutenant seated himself in the witness chair and crossed his legs.

"I believe," Coroner Williams said, looking down at Payne, "that after this inquest was adjourned yesterday, you pursued certain clues which you thought were connected with the death of Horace Bailey Lawton?"

"I did," Lieutenant Payne said.

"Would you care to tell the jury more about the exact nature of these clues?"

"I think it would be better to withhold them until later in the inquest," Payne said, "since they might tip somebody off."

"Very well," the coroner said. "That is perhaps a bit irregular but you may do so. Your investigations at that time did lead you to make a second call at 561 Cleveland Heights Boulevard, the home of the deceased?"

"Yes. I found something about which I wanted to ask a few questions of Philip Norton."

"The same Philip Norton who was on the witness stand yesterday in connection with the death of the deceased?"

"Yes."

"Go on, please."

"We arrived at the Lawton house at about seven o'clock last night and—"

"Just a minute," the coroner interrupted. "Who was the individual or individuals with you, since you use the plural 'we'?"

"Mr. Chin Kham. He left the inquest with me and was with me throughout the investigation which caused me to go see Norton. We arrived at the house at about seven o'clock and Roberts, the Lawton butler, answered the door. I explained that I wanted to see Mr. Norton. Roberts' reply was that Norton was dead and that he had been on the point of calling me."

"Did he reveal how Mr. Norton had died?"

"He claimed he didn't know, but his general impression was that Mr. Norton had also died by violence. I instructed him to call your office, and Mr. Kham and I went on to the Lawton study. Roberts had said the body was there."

"This is the same room in which Mr. Lawton's body was found?" Coroner Williams asked.

"Yes. In fact we found the body of Norton at the same desk where we found Lawton's body. It was obvious at a glance that not only was Norton dead but that he had died a violent death. There was evidence of a struggle. The dictaphone machine had been knocked over, as had an extra chair which was in the corner. Several things had been knocked off the desk and some of them trampled underfoot. Mr. Norton was slumped over the top of the desk, and there was a red scarf around his neck, apparently used to choke him."

"You questioned the members of the household?"

"Yes, but apparently Mr. Norton had been alone in the house at the time of his death."

"Not entirely alone, I imagine," Coroner Williams said with a smile. "There was the person responsible for his death."

"Of course," Lieutenant Payne said, flushing.

"In your opinion, Lieutenant," the coroner continued, "was the death of Horace Bailey Lawton and the death of Philip Norton both caused by the same person?"

"I think so," Lieutenant Payne answered cautiously, "although the methods in both cases were different. Also the motives that seemed to fit the Lawton case won't fit this one. But I still feel the same person did both crimes."

"What do you mean by the motives being different?"

"Well, it seemed natural to think that the motive back of Lawton's death was tied up with hatred for him. Almost everybody who knew him, with the exception of Philip Norton, hated him. But everybody seemed to like Philip Norton just as much as they hated Lawton. My personal opinion, although there's no proof yet, is that Mr. Norton found some clue to the murderer of Mr. Lawton and that is the reason he was killed. He must have run across something there in the study, that didn't look important to us."

"Now," the coroner said, "will you tell the jury, in your own words, of your visit to the Lawton home last night?"

Coroner Williams leaned back in his chair and started drawing a picture of Juror Number Five. When he had it finished, he intended to put horns on it.

XIII

The Night of June 9th

For several seconds after Roberts had announced that Philip Norton was dead, Lieutenant Payne was speechless for one of the few times in his life.

"Did you say Norton is dead?" he finally asked.

"Yes, sir."

Lieutenant Payne, who seldom swore, found relief in a string of unprintable words.

"When the bloody hell did this happen?" he asked when he felt sufficiently relieved to continue the conversation.

"I couldn't say exactly, sir, but I believe within the last hour or so."

"Who found him?"

"Mrs. Forbes and her daughter."

"Where is he?"

"In the study, sir."

"All right, we'll go back and take a look at him. Call the coroner's office, Roberts, and tell Dr. Marcus Allen to come

out. Then call the police department and tell the operator that I want Detectives Corbett and Gallo to come over here immediately. Tell the operator that Mr. Norton has been killed. Then come back to the study. Where are the others?"

"I took the liberty of asking them into the library just before telephoning you. Miss Lawton has not yet returned."

"Good. Come back as soon as you've made the calls."

Philip Norton was at the same desk where they had found Horace Lawton. Only instead of being in the chair as Lawton had, his body was slumped across the top of the desk, with his legs dangling over one side and his head over the other. The floor was covered with papers and articles from the desk. An ink bottle had fallen to the floor, its stopper dislodged, and the rug was spattered with ink.

A thin, red scarf was draped around Norton's neck, its ends trailing down to the floor. Norton's face was congested darkly, the tongue protruding from between his lips. There was no doubt that he was dead.

"This is a hell of a note!" Lieutenant Payne said savagely, his mind groping to cope with a new trend of thought.

There was a sound of hesitant footsteps in the corridor and the butler appeared at the door. He studiously kept his eyes away from the corpse on the desk.

"Dr. Allen reported that he would come out immediately, sir," he said. "The police operator also promised to send the detectives at once."

"Good. What do you know about this business, Roberts?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Uh-huh. All right, Roberts, wait in the library and I'll talk to you later. When Dr. Allen and Detectives Corbett and Gallo arrive, show them right in."

"Yes, sir," Roberts said and walked hastily out.

"I don't think," Payne said when the butler was gone, "that we need be afraid of anybody running out if they've stuck around this long." He walked around the desk and stopped short as he saw something on the floor. He motioned Chin over

What had attracted Payne's attention was a thin, gold pocket watch. It was lying on the floor, face up, and apparently someone had stepped on it. The crystal was crushed into tiny fragments and the minute hand bent down flat against the dial. It was obvious that the damage had stopped the watch. The hands pointed to four minutes past six.

"There must have been some struggle here," Payne observed.

"Mr. Norton was, I imagine, rather strong," Chin said, "and it is difficult matter to strangle a person quickly. Undoubtedly he gave murderer a brave fight."

Lieutenant Payne stooped down and, using his handkerchief, lifted the watch from the floor enough to look at the back. On it were the initials P. R. N.

"It's Norton's watch, all right," he grunted, replacing it. "I thought for a minute we might be getting a break. The watch must have dropped out of his pocket and one of them stepped on it. Looks like that scarf was used to strangle him. Ain't that the same scarf that was in here the other day?"

"I believe so. It is a *kata* or ceremonial scarf, at least. It occurs to me that even Buddha would turn over in grave if he knew use to which it has been put."

Payne grunted. "Doesn't look like anything else has been disturbed, except here by the desk, does it?"

"Seems that no other Buddha has vanished," Chin admitted, glancing around the room. Since he had had no opportunity to examine the room thoroughly the first time, he now took advantage of the wait for the deputy coroner and walked along the wall, looking at the array of Buddhas.

"Maybe you can get one of them to tell you what happened," Lieutenant Payne said dryly.

"Is not impossible," Chin answered seriously. "Many a devout Buddhist has come away with answer to perplexing problem after day of meditation in front of Buddha."

While he was still studying the Buddhas, they heard the front doorbell ring and a moment later Detectives Corbett and Gallo entered the study.

"Another one, huh?" Corbett said. "I thought we was supposed to have the killer in the can."

"You'll have to wait a few minutes, boys," Lieutenant Payne said. "Doc Allen ought to be here any minute now."

"I'll lay you five to one," Corbett said, lighting a cigarette, "that I can tell you what the old buzzard's going to say the minute he steps in here."

"No bet," Payne said shortly.

Chin Kham continued his survey of the Buddhas. The two detectives leaned against the wall, while Lieutenant Payne continued to frown at the corpse. Within a few minutes, the front doorbell rang again.

Dr. Marcus Allen entered the study and peered over the top of his glasses at Lieutenant Payne.

"Ah, good evening, Lieutenant," he said. "What have we here?"

Lieutenant Payne grunted and glared at the grinning Corbett. Dr. Allen turned a professional eye on the body draped across the desk and then went to work, humming a popular song under his breath.

Still humming, the deputy coroner straightened up, wiped his hands on a cloth from his bag. Then he removed his glasses and twirled them around his forefinger as he looked at Lieutenant Payne.

"Death by strangulation," he said. "I imagine you'll find that it was done with that scarf there. The deceased must have put up quite a struggle. There are very severe bruises on the throat, with several small blood vessels ruptured, and I dare say an autopsy will show that the windpipe has been crushed."

"What time would you say it happened?" Payne asked.

Dr. Allen pursed his lips as he dragged out a large watch and consulted it. "Well," he said, "it's twenty-five past seven now. . . . I should say he died about six o'clock, perhaps a few minutes one way or the other."

"That fits," Payne said nodding. "All right, Gallo, you can go to work."

"I have a hunch," he went on, "that you won't find any prints, Gallo, but check over everything. Get a couple of envelopes out of the desk when you've finished and put that watch with all of the pieces of glass in one. Put the scarf in another one, if you can find one big enough. Mark the scarf Exhibit A and the watch Exhibit B."

"Okay," Gallo said.

"Have your Buddhas told you anything yet?" Lieutenant Payne asked, turning to Chin Kham.

"Buddhas often display strange methods of imparting knowledge," Chin answered. He was staring thoughtfully at his right forefinger. "Thus, many times, message does not penetrate ears until much later."

"I once knew a woman who said something like that," Payne said, "but she was a medium and she was talking about spirits. I arrested her."

"My poor ears seem to detect note of irony in official voice," Chin answered, a twinkle in his eyes. "Is it possible that my wandering among the religous relics of my ancestors has disturbed you?"

"Not me," Lieutenant Payne declared, once more experiencing the uncomfortable feeling that he was being laughed at. "But me and Corbett are waiting for you. Unless you don't want to go in and hear the stories of our suspects?"

"I am so sorry," Chin said. "I am most interested in hearing what is to be said. Perhaps I may even be permitted to ask one or two questions?"

"You got something up your sleeve?" demanded Payne.

"Nothing whatsoever up my sleeve, as magician say. I am merely possessed of curiosity concerning one or two trivial matters. Perhaps you would ask them to reveal one thing."

"What's that?"

"I am interested in the actions of everyone throughout the day before death of Mr. Lawton."

"Okay, although I don't see why. Come on."

XIV

The Night of June 9th (Continued)

The library looked much as it had three nights before. Three persons were absent who had been there that night, and there was one addition. And this time Chin Kham was with Lieutenant Payne, instead of sitting across the room watching him with quizzical eyes. At one end of the room, Julius Green sat in an easy chair, seeming strangely subdued as though the gravity of the events in this house had finally occurred to him. Near him was Earl Mason, staring thoughtfully at Green. The studious-faced secretary frowned as though he had found some unbalanced equation.

In practically the same spot as the other night, the servants were across the room. Roberts stood stiffly erect, his gaze directed unwaveringly at the point where the ceiling and the wall met, as if everything depended on that. The two women were seated on the edge of their chairs. Huddled together, they gave the appearance of protecting each other from the rest of the world.

"Who was it discovered the body?" Lieutenant Payne asked.

"I did," the housekeeper answered.

"Would you mind telling me the way you happened to discover him?"

"After the inquest," she said, "Miss Lawton told us that she was going to have dinner downtown and that Mr. Norton was going to eat out, too, so we should take the night off. She told us she would get some servants to run the house soon and we could just live here. Me and Anne come back here and then went out to a little restaurant a few blocks from here and had a bite to eat. We ate early because we was going to go to the movies. But when we left the restaurant, I didn't feel like going to any movies. I told Anne I would rather come back here and lie down. So she came back with me.

"We came in the back way with our keys. The house was all dark except for the front hall light and it seemed awful

quiet. I told Anne I was going to see if everybody was out before I lay down. I looked in the butler's pantry but Roberts wasn't there. Then I came up the hallway and as I reached the study, I looked in. It looked like there was somebody there. It was dark but something didn't look right. I called out but nobody answered, so I went in to turn the light on and see what was wrong.

"I snapped on the light and there I was almost touching poor Mr. Norton. It gave me a start, it did. The first thing I seen was the poor man's face, with his tongue hanging out horrible like. I guess maybe I screamed, for Anne come running up and we got out of there. A minute later Roberts come in and then a little later Mr. Mason."

"What time was it when you found the body?"

"I don't know exactly but it must of been about twenty minutes to seven when we come in. We had intended going to the movies at six-thirty and I guess it took us about ten minutes to get home from there."

"And what time did you leave the house?"

"To go eat? I think it wasn't quite five-thirty, maybe fifteen or twenty minutes after."

"If it was necessary could you prove you were in that restaurant tonight, Mrs. Forbes?"

"I guess so. We've been eating there on our nights off for a long time and the cashier knows us."

"Who was here at the house when you left?"

"Roberts, Mr. Mason and Mr. Norton."

"Your daughter was with you all the time?"

"Yes."

"How long have you known Mr. Norton?"

"Ever since I've been working here he's been coming off and on. It was always very pleasant when he was here, he was always so friendly to everybody. And whenever he was here for a visit, he'd give all of us a little present when he was going away."

"I take it from that, that Mr. Norton was very popular with everyone, including the servants?"

"That he was. I was never able to understand how a nice man like him could be so friendly with a man like Mr. Lawton."

"According to the evidence, you were rather friendly with him yourself once," Lieutenant Payne said dryly.

"That's different!" she snapped. "And that was before I knew what he was like!"

Lieutenant Payne glanced around the room and decided on his next victim.

"Mr. Mason," he said, "you had met Mr. Norton before his present visit?"

"Yes," the secretary said, settling his glasses more firmly on the bridge of his nose as he looked up. "I believe that he was here some twelve or fifteen times during the period I have been employed by Mr. Lawton."

"You knew him well?"

"As well as a secretary would know his employer's friend. We talked a few times, but had very little in common. His only interest was Oriental art, which has never particularly attracted me."

"Did it ever occur to you, Mason, that Mr. Norton might have had something to do with Lawton's death himself?"

"No. I would be inclined to doubt such a theory."

"You would, eh?" Lieutenant Payne looked upon Earl Mason with growing disfavor. "Suppose you tell me where you were this evening."

"Gladly. I was out a trifle over an hour. With the exception of the time consumed in going and returning, I spent the entire time in the Cleveland Heights Barber Shop, which is about fifteen minutes walk from here, getting a haircut."

"What time did you leave the house?"

"It was just five-thirty-two as I came down from my room. I took a cab to the barber shop, arriving there at twenty minutes to six. It was necessary to wait a short while before there was a chair empty. As soon as the barber had finished with me, I walked back here, arriving at ten minutes before seven."

"How come you took a cab over and walked back?"

"That should be self-evident, I believe. I took a cab to the shop, hoping that the few extra minutes might enable me to arrive before the evening patrons started entering. Not being in any hurry, I walked back."

"You're pretty sure of the exact time you did everything, eh? How come you looked at your watch?"

"It is a habit which I have learned. Mr. Lawton always insisted on punctuality, so I quickly learned always to be aware of the time."

"So you feel you're pretty well covered for the time that Norton was killed? I suppose the barber will be able to verify your story?"

"Should it be necessary to verify it, yes. I have been going to the same barber regularly now for five years."

"Do you know what time Norton was killed?"

"Not exactly. I realize that he must have been killed between the time I left and my return, since he was alive when I came downstairs and I was informed he was dead when I entered at ten minutes before seven."

"How'd you know he was alive when you left?"

"I should correct that," Mason said, "and say that I understood he was alive. As I came downstairs, I met Roberts coming from the back of the house. He told me that Mr. Norton was in the study. Fussing around, I believe is the way he described it. From that I naturally inferred he was alive."

"Okay," Lieutenant Payne said, giving up.

"Do you mind," Chin Kham interrupted, "if I ask Mr. Mason one or two questions?"

"Go ahead," Lieutenant Payne said.

"So sorry to intrude myself," Chin said to Earl Mason, "but I would be interested in knowing if you remember your activities of last Friday, during day?"

"I was upstairs, working on the dictation of the night before," Mason said. "I came down, of course, for luncheon and then once again at approximately four o'clock. Mr. Lawton rang for me and I came down to the study. He had a letter

he wished me to file and told me he was going out for a while."

"Ah, yes. As I remember, you stated that you saw Kum Bum Buddha at four o'clock when you were in study?"

"Yes."

"Are you certain you saw it? Please understand I am not doubting word, but it is possible that you believed you saw it because it was always there."

Earl Mason was reflective for a moment before answering.

"I feel almost certain that I saw it," he said finally. "But, as you suggest, it is possible that I imagined I saw it because I expected to see it. I can't be sure now."

"One more question," Chin said, "then I will abandon hopeless attempt to invade Lieutenant Payne's field. Did Mr. Lawton wear glasses?"

"It's curious that you mention that," Earl Mason said, looking brightly at Chin. "As a matter of fact he did, but very few people other than immediate acquaintances knew it. He was rather vain and felt that glasses did not become him. Therefore he wore them only when absolutely necessary, although he should have worn them all the time."

"Was he near-sighted or far-sighted?"

"Near-sighted. I remember his telling me once that he could never see things clearly that were fifteen feet or more away. Pardon my curiosity, but I can't help wondering what that has to do with the case?"

"Merely idle test of deductive powers," Chin murmured. "I remembered small Buddha with clock set in belly—unusual blending of East and West—was placed very near desk, although the placing of it there was not in keeping with way rest of room was arranged. Other Buddhas were placed in definite arrangement. It aroused speculation as to vision. I am sorry, Lieutenant, if I have wasted time."

"That's okay, Chin," Lieutenant Payne said. He turned to question the butler and as he did the front doorbell rang.

"Go ahead and answer it, Roberts," Payne said.

He waited while Roberts went out to the front door. He

heard Betty Lawton's voice and a second later she came into the library. She stopped suddenly and her face turned pale as she saw Lieutenant Payne.

"What's wrong?" she asked, her hand going towards her throat. Her eyes swept the room. "Where's Uncle Phil?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Lawton," Lieutenant Payne said gently. "Mr. Norton was killed this evening."

"Uncle Phil . . . what . . .?"

She sank down into the nearest chair and covered her face with her hands. She made no sound but when she raised her face a minute later her eyes and face were wet.

"What happened?" she asked.

"We hope to find out, Miss Lawton. You stayed downtown this evening after the inquest?"

She nodded. "They let me visit Ted and then afterwards I had dinner at the hotel with Miss Barrett."

"At the Cleveland Hotel?"

"Yes."

"You came straight home after leaving there?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, please don't question me now! I didn't have anything to do with Uncle Phil's death. I loved him too much. He was like the father I never had!"

"I understand," Lieutenant Payne said sympathetically. He turned to Earl Mason again.

"One thing I forgot," he said. "Where were you this morning between ten and eleven?"

"Downtown," Mason answered promptly.

"What were you doing downtown at that hour in the morning?"

"I wasn't aware that it was such an unusual hour of the day," Earl Mason said. "Mr. Norton and I rode downtown together in a cab. I left him at Euclid Avenue and East Ninth Street and went to do some shopping. Later I had lunch and then attended the inquest."

"What did you go shopping for?"

"I felt that I needed a new suit for the funeral and then I purchased accessories that would be appropriate."

"What time did you get downtown?"

"I believe it was about fifteen minutes before ten when I departed from Mr. Norton at Ninth Street."

"How long did you shop?"

"I was finished by eleven-thirty."

"Any way of proving that you were shopping all that time?"

"I can't say. It's possible that some of the salespeople will remember me. There is, of course, the matter of the purchases which will be delivered here in the morning. I should imagine that, together with my statement, should be enough."

"Maybe," Payne grunted.

XV

The Night of June 9th

As a rule, Lieutenant Payne was an optimistic policeman. When a case went bad and every lead turned up a blind alley, he was always the one who felt that the next minute it would break. That was undoubtedly one of the things that had contributed to his success. But the deeper he went into this case the more at a loss he felt.

Although he hadn't questioned either Roberts or Green, it was with something akin to despair that he turned to the butler.

"You saw Mason leave the house just after five-thirty?" he asked Roberts.

"Yes, sir."

"You're sure he left the house?"

"Yes, sir. I saw him go out the door and get into a cab."

"You mentioned to Mason that Mr. Norton was in the study?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you know?"

"I saw him."

"When?"

"About fifteen minutes earlier, sir. I was in the butler's

pantry and I thought I heard someone call. I hastened up the hallway and as I reached the study, I saw Mr. Norton inside, bending over the desk as though he was examining something. I asked him if he had called me and he said that he hadn't. I knew that Miss Lawton was out so I returned to the pantry. A few minutes later it occurred to me that perhaps I heard Mr. Mason. I again went forward, intending to see if it had been Mr. Mason but met him starting out. I asked him if he had called and he said no, so I decided that it had been a child out on the street. I have been fooled by that before."

"Did you see Mr. Norton this second time?"

"No. He had pushed the door almost shut. I gathered that he was doing something which he wished to keep private so I made no attempt to look."

"What did you think he was doing?"

"I had no idea, sir. But he seemed rather impatient at my first interruption, so that prompted the idea."

"I should think," Payne said, "that it would be difficult to see into the study from the hallway, since the door does not open directly into the hall. I'd think that short corridor would be in the way."

"It is difficult, sir," the butler said. "With the door partly open you can see only the desk and the windows beyond it."

"That probably explains why Mrs. Forbes noticed something. She saw the silhouette of the body against the window."

"I would imagine so, sir."

"Were Mrs. Forbes and her daughter in the house then?"

"No, sir."

"Then after Mr. Mason left, there was only you and Mr. Norton in the house?"

"Yes, sir," the butler said. His face was wet with perspiration.

"And you left later?"

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"It was a quarter to six, sir."

"Where did you go?"

The butler hesitated a moment, looking around the room as though he expected some help. None came, so he took a deep breath and answered.

"Next door, sir."

"Next door? Where is that?"

"Mr. Green's, sir."

"Oh-ho," Lieutenant Payne said, coming to life. "And why did you go over there?"

"Well, sir, I heard that Mr. Green's butler might be leaving in the near future and I thought perhaps I might get the job, seeing as how the household here will probably be split up if Miss Lawton marries Mr. Challet."

"But what made you think Green would hire you, since he seemed to think that you stole his knife for Lawton?"

"I don't know, sir," the butler answered uncomfortably.

"By the way, Roberts, did you steal the knife for Lawton? Oh," he added as he saw the fear come into Roberts' face, "I'm not interested in that from the police standpoint. I imagine if you did, Lawton forced you to. Mr. Green will get his knife back and so there is no harm done now. Did you steal it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lawton made you do it?"

"Yes, sir. He got the combination to Mr. Green's safe in some way. And that particular day he watched Mr. Green leave the house and then told me to go over and get the knife. He said that if I didn't, he would see that I went back to prison. He would have, too!"

"You've already told Mr. Green this?"

"Yes, sir. Tonight. I told him all about it and then asked him about the job."

"Did he agree to hire you?"

"We hadn't arrived at that point in the conversation yet."

"How long were you next door?"

"From a quarter to six until about twenty to seven, sir."

"You were there almost an hour and never got to the point of your visit? What were you doing all that time?"

"Speaking about Mr. Lawton and the theft of the knife, sir."

"Why did you return at that time?"

"We were on the porch in the rear of Mr. Green's house. I saw Mrs. Forbes and her daughter enter the house and a moment later I heard Mrs. Forbes scream. Naturally I rushed over to see what was wrong. Mr. Green came with me."

"Apparently, Roberts, you were the last to see Mr. Norton alive?"

"Except the murderer, sir."

"Oh, yes, the murderer. Are you sure, Roberts, that you didn't go over to tell Mr. Green that Mr. Norton had caught on to the two of you and that you had to kill Mr. Norton?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" roared Julius Green, speaking for the first time. He had jumped to his feet and his face was redder than ever. "You better be careful what you're hinting at, Payne! There are also laws that protect citizens from libel—even by cops!"

"I'll talk to you in a minute," Lieutenant Payne said.

"I told you the truth the first time, sir."

"Where were you this morning between ten and eleven, Roberts?"

"Downtown, sir."

"My God, was everybody downtown?" exclaimed Payne. "What were you doing down there?"

"I had run a little short of money, sir, and went down to the bank to withdraw some. I spent some time window-shopping and then had lunch in Clark's on the Square."

"May I suggest," Chin Kham said as Lieutenant Payne hesitated, "that you ask Roberts about his day last Friday?"

"You heard him," Lieutenant Payne said, looking at Roberts.

"I was in the kitchen most of the day. I believe I came to the front of the house three or four times. It was much the same as any other day, sir."

"But you were possibly out for a brief period of time?"

The butler hesitated a moment and then nodded.

"Where?" snapped Payne.

"As a matter of fact," Roberts answered, looking cornered, "I was out back, speaking with Mr. Green for several minutes."

"Regular pals, aren't you?" Payne said sarcastically. "What were you chinning about then?"

"Mr. Green was questioning me about the knife, as he often did."

"But you didn't tell him then?"

"No, sir. I was afraid to."

"Okay. I suppose you were downtown this morning too, Mr. Green?"

"Yes," snapped Green, "and don't waste your breath asking me what I was doing. It's none of your business. I go downtown several times a week and it's not any concern of the police department."

"You don't think it rather odd that you were with Roberts just before Lawton met his death and again about the time that Norton also was killed?"

"What's odd about it? I've probably been with other people when dozens of people were killed, but that doesn't mean that I'm a murderer. I see nothing strange in trying to find out about my stolen property."

"Maybe. Incidentally, where were you during the day last Friday?"

"Home."

"You were home all day?"

"That's what I just said."

"Does that answer what you want to know, Chin?"

"It is sufficient," Chin said. "I would like to ask Mr. Green a question, if you don't mind."

"Go ahead."

"You have been interested in Oriental art many years, Mr. Green?" he asked.

"About fifteen years, I guess," Green answered, looking

at Chin with a rather queer expression on his face.

"Has interest ever spread to collection of Tibetan books?"

"No."

"Too bad. Early editions of *Kangyur* and *Tengyur*, holy books of Lamaism, are very beautiful. Also other early works are worth owning. You probably read the Tibeto-Burman languages?"

"Never even heard of them."

"But surely you read Sanskrit or Pali?"

"No."

"Too bad," Chin said. "By not at least understanding those languages you have cut yourself out of many joys of collecting. You have never been to Tibet?"

"No."

"Do you, Mr. Mason, happen to know if Mr. Lawton read either Sanskrit or Pali?"

"I am not sure," Earl Mason answered, "but I am under the impression that Mr. Lawton did not know any foreign languages. I never heard him mention either of those languages."

"And Mr. Norton?"

"I believe he did. I seem to remember Mr. Lawton speaking of Mr. Norton doing some translation in connection with Tibetan art, but I'm not sure just which language was involved."

"You don't speak it yourself?"

"No."

"I don't suppose there is any chance that you are familiar with those languages, Roberts?"

"No, sir," the butler answered.

"I suppose," Chin said with a sigh, "that it seems just as strange when Americans discover people who do not understand English. . . . So sorry, Mrs. Forbes, but may I intrude upon thoughts long enough to inquire as to your activities of last Friday? You and daughter clean entire house?"

"We do."

"You performed this usual task last Friday?"

"Yes."

"I have never been upstairs," Chin said, "but I imagine it is quite large?"

"Big enough."

"You were both upstairs engaged in cleaning last Friday?"

"Yes."

"In the morning, perhaps?"

"No, in the afternoon."

"As you see, I am extremely ignorant of methods used in cleaning house. You were up there long?"

"I guess three hours."

"Thank you. I am sorry, Miss Lawton, but may I ask one question?"

"Please do," Betty Lawton said. She had composed herself to a certain extent but still looked tearful and deeply depressed.

"You were out during the day last Friday?"

"Yes. I went to the hairdresser's."

"In morning or afternoon?"

"Late afternoon."

"Thank you. I believe, Lieutenant Payne, that I have stuffed myself with knowledge and will bring intrusion of your duties to halt."

"Well, if you've stuffed yourself with knowledge, you've done a hell of a lot more than I have. The more I learn the less I know. Right now I'd trade all my chances for promotion for just one clue as to what the hell happened to that missing Buddha."

"You remember, Lieutenant, that earlier I conversed with Buddhas in study and told you they impart knowledge?"

"What of it?"

"I have learned secret of missing Buddha from Kum Bum." There was a quiet smile on the Tibetan's face as he made this startling statement.

PART V

The thief doth fear each bush an officer.

—*William Shakespeare.*

XVI

Coroner's Inquest—June 10th

Throughout Lieutenant Payne's long account of what had happened the night before, Coroner Williams had remained wide awake. This was more of a tribute to the case than it was to the ability of the lieutenant. The coroner himself was becoming more and more engrossed in the inquiry into the death of Horace Bailey Lawton.

Coroner Williams had been thinking a great deal about the Tibetan, Chin Kham. He had dug up back copies of the *Press, News, Plain Dealer* and *Post* and read all the stories which had appeared in connection with his lectures. Due to Chin Kham's reticence, which the coroner believed was a trait common to Orientals, he had been forced to rely entirely on the newspaper accounts. There he learned that Chin Kham was said to be from the University of Trashilhumpo (wherever that was), that he came from a long line of ruling lamas, one uncle having been the former Tashi Lama, second in power only to the Dalai Lama, and that he was in Cleveland to lecture on Tibetan Culture.

Therefore it was understandable that the coroner took a new lease on life when he heard Lieutenant Payne say that Chin Kham had announced he knew the secret of the missing Buddha.

"You say," Coroner Williams asked, "that as you finished with your questioning last night, Mr. Kham suddenly surprised you by announcing that he possessed the solution to the missing Buddha?"

"He did," said Lieutenant Payne, who was thoroughly enjoying the slight sensation he was causing.

"How was the Kum Bum Buddha spirited away?" Coroner Williams asked.

"It wasn't," Lieutenant Payne said.

"Now just a minute," Coroner Williams said sternly. "According to statements made in this court, the Buddha was definitely missing. It was certainly too large to hide anywhere in the room. So what do you mean by saying that it wasn't missing?"

"Just that," Payne answered, grinning. "It was missing but it wasn't, if you know what I mean."

"I don't," Coroner Williams said flatly. "What do you mean?"

"It was a clever trick," Lieutenant Payne continued. "Clever enough to fool all of us. The Buddha was left there in the room but was disguised with a coat of bronze leaf. There were two other bronze Buddhas in the room, so no one paid any attention to a third one. Chin Kham discovered a piece of the bronze leaf chipping off. Since such a plan never occurred to us, we neglected to check the list of objects more closely."

"But it seems to me that Mr. Mason would have discovered that there was an extra bronze Buddha," the coroner said.

"But there wasn't. That's what made it so clever. There was supposed to be three bronze Buddhas in the room. Mr. Mason was never too familiar with the collection, since Mr. Lawton handled most of the details about it himself, and we all neglected to notice that one of the bronze Buddhas was listed as being quite small and all of those in the study were large. The one small Buddha had been placed inside of a large Buddha on the floor. Most of the Buddhas are hollow, and this particular one was light so it was merely placed over the small bronze one.

"The removal of the small one left a gap along the wall beside the Kum Bum Buddha. The small imitation of the house in which the original Kum Bum Buddha is kept was moved to the other side of it and the ceremonial scarf thrown to the floor. Mr. Mason was familiar with the arrangement of the room and knew that the house was supposed to be on the

right of the Buddha. So he saw an empty space to the left of the house and a check of the list showed three bronze Buddhas, which was correct, and no gold Buddha, and naturally arrived at the conclusion that it had been stolen. The rest of us followed suit until Mr. Kham made his discovery."

"It would seem that you made a natural error," Coroner Williams agreed. "But why disguise an object of art for the purpose of leading the police to believe that it has been stolen? What do you think was the purpose of this?"

"I think Mr. Kham's earlier suggestion was probably right," Lieutenant Payne said. "He thought that the murderer was the person who had been responsible for Mr. Lawton buying the Buddha and that he knew he might be exposed when Mr. Kham saw it. Even stealing it wouldn't have helped, because Mr. Kham would still have known that it had been a phony and the man would still have been exposed. So he killed Mr. Lawton. Then he hid the Buddha to make it look as if the murder had been committed to get the Buddha. That gave us the impression that the murderer believed it to be real and led us away from the actual motive."

"Wouldn't it have been easier for the culprit just to disappear?" the coroner asked.

"I don't think so. Sooner or later he would have been caught. This way he probably felt there was a chance to get away with it."

"That's true. Did you check on the supposed gold of the Buddha, Lieutenant?"

"Yes. It was covered with a very thin plating of gold, so maybe it cost three or four thousand dollars to prepare it."

"That might be. I believe that the late Mr. Norton told us that the Kum Bum Buddha was purchased through a Mr. Edgar Lee of New York?"

"That's right. He also told us that Lee had gone out of business."

"Have you made any attempt to check on Mr. Lee?"

"Yes. I got in touch with the New York Police and they sent me word this morning that Mr. Lee went out of business

more than five years ago, which was a few months after Mr. Lawton had bought the Buddha from him. They couldn't discover where he had gone, but they did get a sketchy description of him which I've sent out over the teletype."

"Good. Were you able to connect Mr. Lee with any other transactions with Mr. Lawton?"

"No."

"Very well. You may step down, Lieutenant Payne."

XVII

The Afternoon of June 10th

After the inquest was adjourned, Lieutenant Payne and Chin Kham left the building together. They stopped on the sidewalk, in front of the building, and waited for the traffic light to change. As they waited, Kay Barrett came running up.

"No you don't," she said. "You two pulled a sneak on me yesterday, but I'm not going to miss all the fun today."

"Unlikely that we will have any fun," Chin Kham said. "Future prospects of Lieutenant Payne and myself include only moments of endless thinking, looking for one loose stone in wall."

"Yeah," Lieutenant Payne said gloomily. "I don't mind admitting that this case has me hanging on the ropes."

"Lieutenant," Kay said, "why don't you have dinner at the hotel with Chin and me? Then you and Chin can talk over your list of suspects."

"If Lieutenant Payne deems that one poor brain can assist in spreading light," Chin added.

"That's a good idea," Lieutenant Payne said. "I'm beginning to feel the only way I can keep sane is to talk to somebody. I'll phone my wife from the hotel. You lecturing tonight, Chin?"

"Yes. Unfortunately lecture contract calls for lecture regardless of murder. Tonight is last of talks, however."

When they reached the hotel, Lieutenant Payne stepped

into a phone booth and made his call. Then the three of them went into the dining room. No mention of the case was made while they ordered, or during the first three courses. Then it was Kay Barrett who broke the silence.

"It looks to me," she said, "as though you have to find out first what Norton was on the track of, that brought the axe down on his neck. He must have run across something. The murderer certainly wouldn't kill him just because he liked Lawton."

"Answer to question you pose," Chin said, "is not impossible to arrive at, but fails to throw any light on other questions. Since Mr. Norton inquired as to presence of art list, it seems he may have remembered that original three bronze Buddhas consisted of two large ones and one small one, instead of three large ones he saw on entering study. He wished to see list to check memory before doing more. Undoubtedly he was familiar with Mr. Lawton's habit of marking list with code for information not already on list."

"If that's the reason he was killed, it points to Mason then, doesn't it?" Kay asked. "He was the only one who knew that Norton wanted the list."

"That does not necessarily follow," Chin said. "Mr. Norton might easily have mentioned thoughts to others, and too, it was simple for everyone to know he was interested in solving case. As he drew near, perhaps face showed some elation or perhaps he made some remark. I devoted some thought to Mr. Mason, thinking perhaps lack of clear motive might indicate hidden one, but he does not fit well. There is question of time. It is doubtful if there was time for killing to take place between time Roberts spoke to Mr. Norton and time Roberts saw Mr. Mason leave. From there on, Mr. Mason's time was devoted to most harmless and ordinary pursuit of having hair trimmed."

"How do you know that he didn't squeeze a little time out to return to the house?" Kay demanded.

"Logic tells me that Lieutenant Payne must have gone over alibi with extreme care this morning. Since he has said

nothing, alibi must have been perfect."

Lieutenant Payne lighted a cigar and thoughtfully dropped three lumps of sugar into his coffee, ignoring the presence of two lumps he had taken before.

"Yeah, you're right," he said. He tasted the coffee, made a face and pushed it away. "I checked all the alibis and, damn it, they're all perfect."

"It might be good idea," Chin suggested, "to draw up schedule of all performers and compare them."

"I already did," Lieutenant Payne said. "I did that this morning after I finished checking the alibis. Then I studied it until my eyes hurt. That was one reason I wanted to talk to you this evening. You did a swell piece of work on finding that Buddha, so I thought maybe if we went over this together something might come of it."

"Finding of 'lost' Buddha is of doubtful value," Chin said, "since I should have found it earlier. Accident of placing finger on Buddha and finding bronze powder on end of it does not indicate great thought. But all men may be bought by flattery, so I shall be glad to assist you."

Lieutenant Payne reached in his coat and brought forth several sheets of paper. He unfolded them and frowned at the first page.

"I started off with Miss Lawton," he said. "On the day her father was killed, she got up rather late, at eleven-thirty to be exact. She breakfasted in the dining room and was then in the library until about two. At that time she left for the hairdresser's. It was while she was there that she phoned Challet. She returned to the house shortly after five and went to her room, where she stayed until eight o'clock. She claimed that she wasn't hungry so she merely had a cup of coffee in the dining room and then went to the library. At eight-thirty she let Theodore Challet in at the front door and the two of them went into the library. They were there talking until Lawton called her from his study at about nine o'clock. She was in with her father until nine-fifteen, when Challet saw her coming out. She claims that she went up to her room and

was there for about fifteen minutes, returning to the library at nine-thirty. She discovered that she had lost the clip from her dress, and at twenty minutes before ten she returned to the study and found Lawton dead.

"On the day of Norton's death, she was home all morning, leaving in time to attend the inquest. After the inquest she was visiting with Challet at the county jail between five and six. At six-thirty, she met Miss Barrett and had dinner with her here at this hotel. She left after dinner and arrived home at eight o'clock. That's her whole record."

"Whereabouts in house is Miss Lawton's room?" Chin Kham asked.

"In the rear, on the second floor. It give you an idea?"

"Merely asking question to prove I am awake," Chin answered with a smile. "Also sometimes asking idle questions helps to bring out good question."

"I don't think she could have done it," Kay said.

"Until this case is finished," Payne said, "I'm going to suspect everybody, including myself! I don't think she would commit murder either, but one of the sweetest girls I ever saw was one who hacked her grandmother up with an axe. See anything I've missed, Chin?"

"No. I fail to see anything else which intrudes itself."

"Then I'll go on to Challet. On the day of Lawton's murder, he reported at his office as usual at nine in the morning. With exception of a half hour when he went out for a sandwich at twelve, he was in the office until two: forty-five, at which time he left for Euclid Village. He remained there until seven-thirty. He arrived at the Lawton house at eight-thirty, and Miss Lawton let him in. They were then in the library until she answered her father's call at nine oclock.

"According to his own statement, which hasn't been released yet, Challet stepped out into the hall shortly after Miss Lawton went to the study. He walked to the front door, looked out and then started back. He saw the door of the wall safe standing open and glimpsed the knife inside. He took it out and handled it. He may be lying but, somehow, I believe

him. He had replaced it and was starting back into the library when he saw Miss Lawton come out of her father's study. From the library he watched her go upstairs. Supposedly he was there in the library alone from nine-fifteen until nine-thirty when Miss Lawton returned. They were together again until Miss Lawton returned to the study at nine-forty. The day that Norton was killed, Challet was in jail, so he can be eliminated on that day. See any loophole, Chin?"

"Nothing new. Story of seeing knife and handling it, to explain fingerprints, is weak when considered with fact that Challet was alone during vital fifteen minutes. If not guilty, he as least was unconsciously of great assistance to murderer. Were fingerprints clear or slightly smudged, as might have been case if someone wearing gloves later used knife?"

"They were smudged slightly, but that would probably happen anyway. The force of the blow would make his hands slip slightly and that would smudge the prints."

"Did Challet remark whether or not he was gazing into hall during fifteen minutes while Miss Lawton was upstairs?"

"He claims he wasn't."

"If you hold that the two murders were done by the same person," Kay said, "I'd think you'd have to eliminate him entirely since he was in jail when the second murder was committed."

"He probably is innocent," Payne grunted, "but the only time you can eliminate anybody in this business is when they're dead or after you've got a conviction. Now, Mrs. Forbes:

"On the day of Lawton's murder she claims she was in the house all day. Three hours of this was spent upstairs and the rest of the time she was in the kitchen. She used the back stairs when she went up to clean, so she wasn't near the library or the study until after the murder. Her daughter verifies this.

"On the day of Norton's murder she was at the house until it was time to leave for the inquest. After the inquest, she

and her daughter returned to the Lawton house but remained only a few minutes. The two of them left the house at about fifteen minutes past five. The restaurant where they ate is just about a fifteen minute walk from the house, and they arrived at the restaurant at just five-thirty. The cashier knows them because they have been eating there once a week for as long as she can remember. She remembered the time because they were earlier than usual and she said something about it to Mrs. Forbes, who answered that she and her daughter were going to a movie. They left the restaurant at about twenty past six. They probably dallied around the theatre for another five minutes while Mrs. Forbes was deciding that she didn't want to go, so that her claim of arriving back at six-forty is probably about right. They entered at the rear of the house and Mrs. Forbes walked towards the front to see if anyone was there. She thought she saw something or somebody in the study and entered.

"My own personal opinion is that she thought nobody was home and it was a good chance to snoop in the study. Whatever the reason, she discovered Norton's body and screamed. Her daughter ran to her and a moment later Roberts came in.

XVIII

The Afternoon of June 10th

"Now we come to Roberts," Lieutenant Payne went on, glancing back at his notes. "With the exception of about an hour, he apparently spent the entire day last Friday in the house. Most of the time he was at the rear of the house, although he says he was to the front door maybe four or five times. When Lawton went out, Roberts went over to talk to Julius Green. He says that he was at the back door and Green called him over. That may be true. Anyway he was out for approximately an hour and then returned to the house. After dinner he was in the butler's pantry, reading, until the bell rang at about twenty minutes before ten. He

was just opening the front door to let you two in when Miss Lawton went to the study the second time.

"Now, on the day that Norton was killed, Roberts left the house in the morning. He claims that he came downtown to his bank on Euclid Avenue and withdrew some money. After that he went window shopping. But he has no way of proving where he was or what he was doing during the time in which the letter of warning to you was handed in at the messenger service office.

"After the inquest, Roberts returned straight to the Lawton house. He was in the butler's pantry at about five-fifteen when he thought he heard a call from somewhere in the front of the house. He walked up the hallway and, as he passed the study, he saw the door was open and paused. He saw Norton in the study, leaning over the desk, apparently examining something.

He asked Norton if he had called and Norton said no. At this point, Roberts decided that he had heard a child yelling in the street and went back to his pantry. About fifteen minutes later he again came up the hall, noticed that the door to the study was closed, and as he reached the front of the house he met Mason going out. He stayed by the door a few minutes, long enough at least to see Mason climb into a cab. Then he went back to the kitchen.

"At fifteen minutes to six, he left the house by the back door and went over to talk to Julius Green about a job. At this time he told Green all about Lawton making him steal the knife from Green's safe. All the time they were talking they were on Green's back porch, in full view of the back door to the Lawton house. At twenty minutes to seven they saw Mrs. Forbes and her daughter return and enter the house. A moment later they heard Mrs. Forbes scream and they both rushed over . . . Any ideas on Roberts, Chin?"

"Later," Chin said.

"Well, to get on. I took Mason next. He spent last Friday working in his room upstairs in the front. He was downstairs for about thirty minutes at lunch time. Then at

about four, Lawton called him downstairs by means of a buzzer system. Lawton gave him some papers to file and told him that he was going out for a while. Mason isn't too sure that he saw the Kum Bum Buddha in its own state at that time. He was again upstairs until dinner time, when he was down for about thirty minutes. Then he returned upstairs to finish some work. At fifteen minutes to ten he remembered that you were coming and that Lawton had wanted him to be present. So he put away his things and went downstairs, arriving just as Roberts was calling headquarters.

"Mason's morning can only be partly checked for the day that Norton was killed. He came downtown in a cab with Norton, leaving the cab at Ninth Street and Euclid Avenue at about fifteen minutes to ten. From then until eleven-thirty, he claims he was shopping. It's difficult to check. A couple of stores remember him, the others don't. He did do enough shopping to take that long. He had lunch downtown and attended the inquest.

"He went straight home from the inquest and went up to his room. At five-thirty-two, say five-thirty, he left the house to get a hair cut. In almost anyone else, this would sound screwy, but Mason is the kind of a methodical guy who would go get a hair cut at his regular time if there was an earthquake. He took a cab from the house and arrived at the Cleveland Heights Barber Shop at twenty minutes to six. All the chairs were busy and there were a few people ahead of him, so he had to wait. But there's no doubt that he was there all the time. He's been going to that shop every two weeks, like clockwork, for five years. He was through at the barber shop at six-thirty-five and walked home. It's a good fifteen-minute walk and he arrived there at about ten to seven, which makes everything fit like a tight glove."

"Later," Chin said, in response to Payne's glance.

"Julius Green next. There isn't a lot to go on with him for either time. He claims he was home all day last Friday and his servants verify that. But of course there were long stretches when they didn't see him. They can swear that he

was there at about nine-fifteen in the evening and again at ten-thirty, but they can't swear he was there in between those times and it was somewhere in that period that Lawton was killed. On Green's side of the ledger is the fact that he appeared surprised when he heard that Lawton was dead.

"On the morning that Norton was killed, Green also came downtown in the morning, but he still refuses to tell why he came down or what he was doing up to inquest time. At the time Norton supposedly was killed, Green was talking with Roberts."

Lieutenant Payne looked up at his audience of two, "What's your conclusion?" he asked.

"No conclusion," Chin answered. "Many thoughts of doubtful value, but no conclusions. One strange thing is noticeable in comparing two cases. Upon murder of Lawton, no one had alibi—except Mrs. Forbes and daughter, Anne. Since each of them might be guilty person, supplying alibi for each other is not enough. So we can still say no one had alibi. Upon murder of Norton, everybody have alibi. It is as if everyone knew there was going to be second murder and supplied themself with alibi. That of course is not the case, but it does seem like it."

"Some of the alibis aren't so hot though," Kay said.

"True. But question of alibis is not most perplexing problem. Biggest stumbling block to solution of case is motive."

"Explain," Kay said promptly, while Lieutenant Payne leaned back and prepared to listen.

"First murder was undoubtedly well planned," said Chin, "and murderer, unless he is one who has not yet come into picture, was clever enough to foresee that most people would not have alibi. That is case which is nearly always true in real life, but most murderers make mistake of providing themselves with good alibi. This murderer did not have alibi either, therefore did not stand out from other suspects.

"But second murder was undoubtedly planned more hurriedly. Therefore it is possible that there might be more flaws

in it. I doubt if murderer knew that everyone else would have alibi, but he probably knew that some would. Therefore he also arranged alibi. This produced strange situation wherein not one person has alibi for first murder and everybody has alibi for second murder. If motivation were more clear, then it should be easy to break down one or more alibis.

"But, as I said, motivation is stumbling block. Who has weakest alibi for murder of Norton? Both Julius Green and Roberts. But when we turn to possible motivation on first murder, we find that in both their cases it is most likely revenge. Mr. Green because of stolen knife and Roberts because of abominable way he was treated.

"If we accept revenge as motivation of killing of Lawton, it leaves unsolved mystery of why Kum Bum Buddha was disguised with bronze coat. And murder, like well-knit sweater, must have no loose ends hanging down. So we discard Mr. Green and Roberts.

"We might next try one with strongest alibi, but there we find all of about equal strength. And in every case we again run into Kum Bum Buddha. Mr. Mason did not enter Lawton's life until after Buddha was purchased, and if he has any motive it would also appear to be connected with treatment. But why was Buddha disguised? Still same problem.

"Mrs. Forbes, perhaps, has strongest motive of all—and again it is revenge for treatment. Same applies to daughter. So why was Buddha disguised?

"Miss Lawton and Mr. Challet had strong motive, since they stood to lose many millions of dollars. Then just as we arrive at this conclusion we are once more faced by respectable Kum Bum Buddha, liberally covered with bronze. It is becoming virtual demon!

"We have now reached stage where we are left with only two suspects who can fit possible demands in way of motive. One is Mr. Norton who is furnished with alibi by being second victim. The other is Mr. Lee, who exists in name only. We are in dilemma of man with beautiful sail boat in middle of desert."

"A fine thing!" Kay said. "You just throw out all suspects as if it never happened at all."

"The trouble is," Lieutenant Payne said gloomily, "he is absolutely right, yet you know he has to be wrong. I've gone over the list, without hitting all the fine points he did, but I arrived at the same end—and I don't like it."

"There is possibility," Chin Kham said, "that murderer cleverly disguised Buddha merely to lead us off on wrong track. But that, too, has drawbacks, if we accept thought that murder was motivated by revenge or hatred. Why go to so much bother? It would have been far easier to steal some small object, such as jade from Chou Dynasty, which would have provided proper red herring."

"The trouble with Chin," Kay said to Lieutenant Payne, "is that he no sooner thinks of a swell idea, than he thinks of reasons why it's no good. I don't know why he even bothers.

"Okay. But now that we've proved that all our suspects are innocent, what do we do next?"

"I am afraid," admitted Chin, "that my actions for present are all arranged." He glanced at his watch. "I must leave now for business of lecture. You would not care to hear it, Lieutenant?"

"Not tonight," Payne said. "I'm going home and keep going over this damn list until I see something besides spots in front of my eyes. The answer has to be in here somewhere!"

"Chin," Kay said suddenly, "do you mind if I don't go to the lecture tonight? I'm going to make up my own list and pore over it. It's starting to get me—just like crossword puzzles got me once."

"Will manage to struggle along by myself," Chin said.

XIX
The Night of June 10th

As had been the case on Saturday and Monday nights, the lecture hall was so packed the management had hung out the

SRO sign. Since the beginning of the series, the platform had been decorated in a way the management thought appropriate for a series of lectures on Tibetan culture. The wall in the back had been covered with a weird assortment of Chinese and Japanese tapestries. To one side of the speaker's stand there stood an unkempt Buddha with malodorous incense curling up from his lap. Chin Kham tried to ignore all this as he waited to be introduced.

"*Daymoora hla Rimpoche,*" he said. "Meaning 'Peace be with thee, O Holy One'; that is how you should greet Tibetan lama should you ever meet one. But if you also wish to be considered polite by lama, you must stretch out both hands, palms upturned, and stick out your tongue at him. That finishes Tibetan lesson for tonight.

"I have noticed that audience has been large last two nights, while first night showed only scattered enthusiasts for Tibetan culture. I think perhaps I have arrived at solution to mystery of large attendance. Sudden increase in popularity of much-advertised Tibetan scholar is perhaps due to fact that newspapers report presence of Tibetan scholar at local murder which occurred last Friday night in Cleveland Heights. It is first duty of scholar to be exact, and second duty to be entertaining, so that knowledge may be injected without pain to patient. Slow plodding of thoughts eventually has brought this scholar to point of believing that perhaps audience would rather hear discourse upon murder than to learn that Tibetan paintings are usually executed in Tempera or Encaustic, or that Tibetan Wheel of Life is divided into six parts, known as *Om, Ma, Ni, Pad, Me* and *Hum.*"

He paused. The audience at first was silent, then the applause broke out enthusiastically.

"Murder," Chin continued blandly, as though accustomed to lecturing on it every day, "is perhaps most intimate of crimes. It is also only crime which mankind has never fully understood, which is reason great writers and great philosophers, in every language, have concerned themselves with it for centuries.

"We have long had answers to other crimes. A man steals because he is hungry or because he desires possession of object. Same reason can be given for such crimes as blackmail, robbery and treason. In few cases there is one other reason, which men, wise in the ways of the community, have called environment. Man commits adultery because he desires a particular woman or because he is bored. Man commits arson because of greed, hatred or mental illness. In some cases, murder is committed for these reasons also, but there are many murders committed merely because on spur of moment one man desires to plunge knife into another man.

"There are many kinds of murderers, but only three kinds of murder. One is murder planned as carefully as one does the building of a home; another is the murder, mentioned before, which is executed because of sudden desire for destruction or perhaps for mere joy of murdering; the third is the kind planned by a writer for inclusion in a book, which often inspires very young or very foolish persons to emulate the villain of the story.

"Murder is perhaps one of oldest habits of man. The Christian religion relates that in the beginning Cain slew Abel; ancient mythology tells of murder among Olympian gods. Every day there is murder, and so it has always been. Therefore murder is with all—there probably exists no family which has not at some time experienced murder—yet we still do not understand it.

"That is murder from objective viewpoint, but we arrive at same conclusion when we view murder in more home-like surrounding. But in such case, in order that we do not become in awe of murder, we pretend that we understand. We nod wisely to each other and say that so-and-so committed murder for this reason or that cause. If we are police, we build up our confidence by saying that the murderer is stupid; if we are the murderer, we give ourselves security by saying police are stupid. By so doing, the police mortgage their brains, the murderer his soul.

"The murderer now hunted by local police has success-

fully committed two kinds of murder. His first was carefully planned, his second dictated by necessity. Failure, even with murderers, is always brought on from within, not from without. The murderer of Mr. Norton and Mr. Lawton will not be captured by police, but by himself.

"What then, many will ask, of the excellent work of police department? Once police have fully investigated a murder and have written down all things which took place, with complete record of all persons present or nearby, they have in front of them a puzzle. They go over it, examining each piece with careful attention, and eventually they will find one spot which does not look right. Every particle composing mystery falls into place but there is always one piece which either does not belong or is in a spot from which it can be moved without disturbing rest of puzzle.

"Perhaps I make this sound too easy. There can be no doubt that such discoveries are difficult, but they are possible where you have stories of all persons concerned. With time and sufficient thought, any one of you could discover murderer of Mr. Lawton and Mr. Norton through study of newspaper accounts.

"This may seem negation of my statement that murderer will be captured by himself instead of police, but it is not. Once you have detected flaw which must exist, there is still matter of proof. It must be proved to jury of men so that they can pronounce judgment of society. But in many cases, where murderer has displayed intelligence, such proof does not exist even to numerous scientific instruments. Proof, or perhaps only links connecting things which go to make up proof, exist only in murderer's head and heart.

"In order to commit murder, murderer has mortgaged soul. When he sees faulty brick in murder construction being carefully examined, he is like man who witnesses one wall of new house collapse before he has finished paying for it. He rushes for blueprints to show that such thing cannot happen. And it is blueprints that police want.

"The death of Mr. Lawton aroused many feelings and

many speculations in this city and perhaps elsewhere. It seems many people have been torn between horror at act and approval of results. Perhaps many would have lost interest in pursuit if murderer had stopped there, but next step cost him all sympathy. Because of nature of crime, however, many questions asked themselves. These were questions which, once answered, would apparently identify murderer, but such was not true. In many cases, yes—here, no. Answer of what seemed important questions only confused major problem more. Therefore, important questions must be ones which seem unimportant.

"I am aware that all people have desire to work out puzzles which deal so intimately with life and death. That is reason I have discussed murder tonight instead of launching many words upon meaning of Seven Personal Gems or Eight Glorious Offerings. That is also reason why I will offer you small hint so that you may return home and pore over newspaper stories of murders. More than hint would be out of question, but perhaps police in charge of case will provide full answer by tomorrow.

"I have mentioned apparently unimportant questions which may be heart of mystery. They have perhaps been shoved into background by more provoking thoughts of Kum Bum Buddha which vanished and of identity of Mr. Edgar Lee featured in headlines today. But key to puzzle lies in actions of suspects at times other than when murder was committed, in obvious deductions to be drawn from personality of late Mr. Lawton, in looking for elusive Mr. Lee in unexplored spots, and in accepting undeniable fact that murderer was telling entire truth when giving alibi covering death of Mr. Norton.*

"Should members of audience wish to offer mental competition to Lieutenant Payne and police force, there is ancient Tibetan proverb which, in view of emotional reactions in-

* Although Chin Kham had still to verify two facts which he had guessed, all elements necessary to arrive at the identity of the murderer of Horace Lawton and Philip Norton have been presented.

volved in this case, should be remembered: 'Poison is not to be taken even though offered by one's mother; but gold is acceptable even from one who is inimical.' "

Chin Kham bowed and walked off the stage, as the audience applauded. There was a twinkle in Chin's eyes as he saw the still-bewildered expression on the chairman's face.

Chin walked briskly down the street, apparently immersed in his own thoughts and paying little attention to his surroundings. Strangely enough, he did not turn off to go towards Superior Avenue and his hotel until he reached West Third Street, which had few pedestrians on it and was more dimly lighted than the other crosstown streets.

He was halfway to Superior Avenue when he heard the soft footsteps behind him become more rapid. He maintained his own even pace, trying to gauge their nearness by sound alone. But then he was surprised to hear them suddenly increase to a running tempo.

Realizing that he had waited too long, he whirled to meet the threat, caught a brief glimpse of the shadowy figure and the arm already plunging down. The street light glinted on the metal gripped in the swiftly-striking hand and a second later there was a sharp thud as it reached its mark.

PART VI

Many can brook the weather that love
not the wind.
—William Shakespeare.

XX

The Morning of June 11th

On the morning of Tuesday, June 11th, Chin Kham woke early. As he jumped out of bed, a sharp twinge of pain in his neck and left shoulder served to remind him of what had happened the night before. When he had changed the subject of his lecture from Tibetan art to murder, he had hoped

that it would provoke an attack. He had expected to turn around just in time to catch his attacker in the act, but a sudden rush at the last minute had thrown him off. As it was, he was lucky. The blow, with what was probably a short piece of pipe, had scraped the side of his head and crashed down on his neck and shoulder. If he hadn't been turning it would have brained him.

He probably would have been killed anyway, for the blow had brought him to the very edge of unconsciousness, but as from a great distance he heard someone shout and then the swift thud of feet as his assailant raced away. A moment later a husky young man was helping him to his feet. It had taken several moments more before his senses fully returned. Then he had thanked his rescuer, rejected an offer to call the police and walked unsteadily to his hotel.

As the pain in his shoulder reminded him of all this, Chin walked over to the mirror to see the damage. His shoulder and part of his neck was an angry purple in color, but the bruise was the only damage, he decided.

He stood there several minutes, slowly taking the stiffness from his muscles with careful exercise. Then he dressed and went downstairs for breakfast.

Early as he was, he found Kay Barrett in the dining room grill, putting the finishing touches to an omelette. A morning paper was in front of her.

"So that's the reason you didn't care if I stayed away from the lecture last night!" Kay said, looking up from her paper. "I should have known you were going to pull a fast one. Why don't you ever let me get in on these sleigh rides when you take them?"

"Not always sure who is sleigh and who is passenger," Chin answered with one of his wry smiles. He gave his order to the waiter and then asked: "Newspaper took notice of small change in lecture?"

"They gave you as much space as they gave the war news," Kay said, "and if you ask me, Lieutenant Payne is

going to be burning up, eight to the bar. Just so you can rehearse your speech, what the hell was the idea?"

"Merely wished to check accuracy of certain observations," Chin said. "I also hated to talk Oriental art forms to people who came primarily to view witness of crime scene. Therefore I gave them adequate return on their slight investment and at same time verified thoughts of last few hours."

"I'd like another helping, if you don't mind," Kay said. "Make this one a little clearer."

Chin waited until the waiter had placed the coffee and roll in front of him and departed, before he answered.

"Finding of lost Kum Bum Buddha and one important question which I asked earlier prompted me to believe it possible murderer might keep somewhat attentive eye on me. But there was also possibility that I waste my time in futile pursuit of clues which mean nothing. So, on chance that murderer was present last night, I conceived of lecture on murder which offered opportunity to present line of thought."

"What made you think the murderer would be there?"

"Suspects were well represented. In audience were Mr. Green, Mr. Mason, Roberts, Mr. Challet and Miss Lawton. Also witnessed county coroner there."

"No fooling?"

Chin nodded. "Very full house. I vaguely gave out hints on how crime might be solved, but it is doubtful if they would mean as much to others as to murderer. He, however, sees before him one man who has pierced weakness in armor which he felt sure is hidden from sight. He knows that references are sufficiently vague to make it unlikely that others will pursue tracks up same road, but it also leave him with obvious task to do."

"Wait a minute," Kay said. "You mean that you were deliberately holding yourself out as bait?"

"Something like that. I thought murderer might watch for early opportunity to dispose of new menace. To assist such thought, if it existed, I took route back to hotel which

would offer best chance. Murderer proved himself opportunist, for on West Third Street he made bold attempt to dispatch me to my ancestors."

"Chin! What happened? You mean you caught the murderer?"

"Unfortunately, no," Chin confessed. "I made fatal mistake of being over-confident. I envisioned murderer stalking nearer and nearer until within striking distance. But undoubtedly knowledge of danger made murderer more hasty, because he suddenly abandoned leisurely pursuit in favor of quick dash. Before I could turn around, he struck me with some metal instrument and knocked me to sidewalk. Before he could finish business at hand, a husky young stranger appeared on scene and murderer fled."

"But you saw him?"

"Regret to say that only thing I saw for some time was vivid streaks of light. Murderer remained mere patter of footsteps. Presence of weapon, which was perhaps short length of pipe, introduces new thought that perhaps the bait used last night was not necessary. Murderer must have already decided that I should be eliminated and had come prepared to follow me regardless of subject of lecture."

"I smell a mouse in the corn bin—and I do mean corn—about that story of just wanting to verify your ideas. Two will get you twenty that you had a foxy idea of capturing the murderer single-handed and then turning him over to Lieutenant Payne with the grand gesture. And you were going to leave me out of it!"

"Perhaps some such idea did occur," Chin admitted. "But not of leaving you out."

"Lieutenant Payne is going to want your hide nailed on a board for that. Anyway, you're probably right about no one else being able to make sense out of that gibberish you gave them last night. The reporter in this paper gives the suggestions you made and then tries to solve the case from them. He concludes that there are only two answers, one being that the whole speech was an idea of your press agent—

I'll murder the bum!—and the other, following your line of reasoning, that you are guilty yourself. He said that you are the only person who fits in with the attempts to look for Edgar Lee in unexplored spots, so the others must fit you, too."

"Perhaps it's just as well."

"You know, the thing that's going to make Payne sore about this is that the murderer will probably skip—if he hasn't already."

"I think not," Chin said gravely. "There are several arguments against such action. To run away would be to admit guilt, and he undoubtedly knows he would eventually be caught. If he was type to run away, he would have done so before starting killings. But having gone this far, he will attempt to see it through. The attack on me having failed, he will probably try to strengthen weak spots and play it out. In addition, I imagine Lieutenant Payne has men watching neighborhood of Green and Lawton homes for such event."

"Did you notice there was a telegram in your box? I tried to get them to give it to me, but they wouldn't."

"I received it," Chin answered.

"Who was it from?"

"Contents valuable military secret," Chin answered.

"Wait a minute!" Kay snapped. "You're not trying to pull a fast one on me, are you?"

"Wouldn't think of it, but think it better to set stage properly before opening curtains," Chin said, smiling. He arose from the table. "I am going now. Should Lieutenant Payne again call, you might tell him I am on my way to see him."

"I'll tell him that you're trying to skip town and he'd better send out orders to pick you up!"

"I will see the Lotus Blossom of the West at the inquest. But first comes report of attack on humble person of Tibetan scholar."

"It's too bad you didn't get a look at the guy," Kay said, forgetting her annoyance at the thought."

"Perhaps it wasn't necessary to see assailant to know

identity," Chin said softly, and was gone before the import of his remark had penetrated to Kay. She jumped up too late.

XXI

The Morning of June 11th

Chin Kham paid the taxi driver and walked into the Cleveland Heights Police Headquarters building. He passed down the corridor and knocked on the door to Lieutenant Payne's office.

"Come in," Payne yelled.

"So sorry to interrupt important matters," Chin said, opening the door and stepping inside.

"You!" roared Lieutenant Payne when he recognized his caller. "You got a hell of a nerve coming here! I ought to throw you in jail! What the hell was the idea of handing out this mess of stuff in your lecture last night? My God, you're responsible for letting a swarm of amateurs down on us that's worse than the locusts! Do you realize that I've had fifty-two calls this morning from dim-witted morons who attended your lecture last night and have figured out from your remarks that practically everybody but Donald Duck is guilty!"

"So sorry," Chin repeated when Lieutenant Payne had finally stopped because of lack of breath. "Lecture was not meant to arouse amateur instincts of audience, but it was thoughtless of me not to remember that such was likely to happen."

The phone rang and Lieutenant Payne grabbed the receiver and growled into it. Chin could hear the metallic clacking of the voice on the other end of the wire.

"No!" shouted Lieutenant Payne. "And I don't want to know!" He banged the receiver down and glared at Chin.

"You see what I mean," he said. "Another one! What the hell was the idea? Did you just feel like amusing yourself?" He was beginning to calm down a little.

"Entire lecture was aimed at one person," Chin said, "for purpose of checking accuracy of certain ideas."

"I'll admit that you did a good job of figuring out that business about the Kum Bum Buddha," Lieutenant Payne said, "but hell's brimstone, that don't mean that you're already a first class detective. That straight logic stuff might go back in Tibet, but here you got to do a lot of plugging, and a lot of keeping your mouth shut, to get anywhere. Who was the audience of one you wanted to impress?"

"The murderer. It is possible he was there. Among those who listened avidly to unscheduled lecture was Mr. Green, Mr. Mason, Roberts, Mr. Challet and Miss Lawton."

"Yeah, I know about that," grunted Payne. "This department ain't asleep, even if a lot of people think so. Some of my men followed them to the auditorium. When they called in to report where the suspects had gone, I pulled them off. I figured they couldn't do any harm listening to you, but I never figured on you doing the cutting up."

"Purpose of impromptu lecture succeeded," Chin offered. "On way home, earnest attempt was made to remove me from scene of living."

"You mean somebody tried to bump you off last night after the lecture?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Regret to say that it was impossible to see assailant. Unfortunate contact with piece of metal pipe left me in state of seeing only stars. Due to intervention of passing stranger, assailant took flight without finishing job."

"Tried to brain you, huh? Serves you right for shooting off your mouth last night. You're lucky you wasn't killed."

"Lieutenant misses most significant point of encounter."

"You mean the fact that the first time he used a knife, strangled his second victim, and was going to brain the third?"

"That is nothing but indication of being versatile," Chin said. "Thing that stands out like ears of famous movie actor is possession of metal pipe. Does a man reach into air and pluck out metal pipes?"

"That's right," exclaimed Payne. He glanced shrewdly at

Chin. "You think he was planning something with it?"

"Would indicate perhaps that he intended to eliminate me even before remarks of lecture. Perhaps discovery of missing Buddha suggested such a move."

"I've got one more bone to pick with you," Lieutenant Payne said, picking up the newspaper on his desk. "What the hell was the meaning of these four things you mentioned? The first one is clear, but we've already gone over that Friday afternoon angle and didn't get anywhere. But what's the crack about Lawton's personality?"

"Not sure, but maybe he had fear of being cheated," Chin answered somewhat evasively.

"So he was afraid of being cheated! What's that got to do with it?"

"Cannot say as yet."

"Well, I'm sure of one thing. You've either gone completely nuts because of finding that Buddha—or you're getting ready to pull something. Which is it?"

"Perhaps neither. Sometimes a sage gains reputation by quoting proverbs when he has nothing to say."

"You know," Payne said, "you speak pretty damn good English, sometimes better than others. Where were you educated?"

"In America, not far from here, at Ohio University, and also at University of Trashilhumpo in Tibet."

"Maybe you ought to give up this lecturing business and become a detective. You did pretty good with that Buddha and you would probably do better on the case as a whole if it wasn't such a mess. You'd probably be pretty good after you had a little experience."

"I shall keep it in mind," Chin said gravely. "In meantime, you do not object if I blunder around in foolish attempt to find trail of murderer?"

"No, go ahead."

"Then I have two small favors to request."

"What are they?"

"One is that you arrange to have occupants of Lawton

house leave for inquest early this afternoon and other is that you ask Coroner Williams to delay start of inquest until I arrive. Both requests most important."

"Why do you want everybody out of the Lawton house early?" Lieutenant Payne asked suspiciously.

"It is perhaps better if I do not tell you," Chin said. He smiled. "But it would be well if you inform patrolman in neighborhood not to shoot should he glimpse broad Tibetan rump disappearing through window of Lawton house."

"So that's it, huh? What's on your mind?"

"Far better if I come bearing whole pie rather than sprinkling few crumbs in your hand, else you may not believe in existence of pie. I give you all assurance that I will behave with utmost circumspection within house. But it is important that I see certain things inside Lawton home."

"It's against my better judgment," Lieutenant Payne said gloomily. "Something tells me I'll be sorry . . . But, okay, I'll do it. But if you don't come up with something and Miss Lawton makes a complaint, I may have to arrest you for breaking and entering."

"That is agreeable, but it is hoped such necessity will not arise. Thank you, Lieutenant."

XXII

Coroner's Inquest—June 11th

Coroner Williams glanced over the spectators and anticipated the excitement that would sweep over the room when he opened the inquest. He glanced involuntarily towards the press to be sure they all had their pencils ready. A lover of anything that helped to break the monotony of everyday routine, he was so pleased that he failed to be annoyed by the impatient cough of Juror Number Five.

The inquest had been postponed for almost thirty minutes, and Coroner Williams had just entered with Lieutenant John Payne and Chin Kham. Although Coroner Williams was as much in the dark as the jury and the spectators as to

what was shortly to take place, he was beaming. Lieutenant Payne, also mystified, was fretful.

"Lieutenant Payne," Coroner Williams called, deciding that he would have to make one small concession to routine.

The lieutenant left his seat and sat in the witness chair.

"In your testimony of last Monday," Coroner Williams said, "you mentioned that a certain new development had prompted you to go to the Lawton house for the purpose of talking to Philip Norton, but you stated that you believed that it was better if the new development was not revealed to the jury until later. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Are you now ready to inform the jury of that development?"

"Yes."

"Will you please do so then."

Lieutenant Payne drew a letter from his pocket. Attached to it was a small card. He handed this to the coroner.

"Exhibit D," he said, "in the matter of the inquisition upon the body of Horace Bailey Lawton, deceased.

"Mr. Chin Kham, who was responsible for finding the Kum Bum Buddha, came to me on Monday with this letter which had been delivered by messenger to his hotel. You will see that it's addressed to him at the hotel. The message is written in the Pali language, which I understand is used in Tibet, and according to Mr. Kham's translation it is a warning for him not to be too interested in the death of Horace Lawton. The name at the bottom, where the signature would ordinarily be, means King of Death."

"Is it your belief, Lieutenant, that this note of warning was written by the late Mr. Norton?"

"I don't know," Lieutenant Payne admitted frankly.

As Payne regained his seat, an attendant stepped up and handed him a telegram. He tore it open and read the message hurriedly. He looked over at Chin Kham and then seemed on the verge of saying something to the coroner, but hesitated and finally relaxed back in his chair.

"I am about," Coroner Williams began, "to take a step which I believe is unprecedented in this office. I am motivated by the realization that this inquest exists solely for ascertaining all of the facts pertinent to the death of Horace Bailey Lawton and the subsequent death of Philip Norton. From this point on, the questioning of witnesses will be conducted by Mr. Chin Kham, whom you have heard on the witness stand. Towards this end, I have appointed Mr. Kham as a deputy coroner of the county of Cuyahoga."

"It ain't legal, is it?" asked Juror Number Five, leaning forward and scowling at the coroner.

"The legality of the actions of this office," Coroner Williams replied coldly, "is not a matter which concerns this jury. The question of legality, when there is a question, is decided by the courts."

There, he thought, that ought to put Juror Number Five in his place.

"Will you come forward, Mr. Kham?" he asked aloud.

Coroner Williams was not disappointed. The reporters were scribbling notes at great speed, and a murmur of excitement spread among the spectators as an attendant placed a chair beside Coroner Williams. Chin Kham stepped up and seated himself. He and the coroner then exchanged a few words in an undertone which could not be heard by anyone else.

In the meantime, an attendant had brought a paper-wrapped bundle and placed it by the chair which Chin occupied.

"John Roberts," Coroner Williams called.

The white-faced butler came forward, was sworn in, and seated himself in the witness chair.

"You were employed as butler in home of Mr. Lawton prior to his death last Friday?" Chin asked.

"Yes."

"And you were in the Lawton house the day Mr. Norton met his death?"

"Yes."

"You have stated you were in rear of house and thought you heard someone call. On going forward to investigate, you saw door to study was partly open and Mr. Norton was visible within?"

"Yes."

"What was Mr. Norton doing?"

"He appeared to be examining something on the desk."

"Could you see all of Mr. Norton?"

"No. As he was leaning over the desk, only part of him was in sight."

"Could you see his face?"

"No."

"You stopped in hallway and inquired of Mr. Norton if he had called?"

"Yes."

"What was his exact reply?"

"He said 'No.'"

"In sharp clear tones?"

"No. I think his voice was sort of muffled, as though he had his face close to something on the desk."

"You then returned to rear of house and later came up to the front door when Mr. Mason was leaving?"

"Yes."

"Later you left house, I believe, to speak again to Mr. Green. At what time did you leave?"

"At a quarter to six."

"You did not see Mr. Norton between first instance and time of leaving house?"

"No."

"Do you remember approximate times you saw Mr. Norton and when Mr. Mason left house?"

"It was about a quarter past five when I spoke with Mr. Norton. Mr. Mason left at five-thirty."

"How long were you with Mr. Green?"

"From a quarter to six until twenty to seven."

"That is all."

"You may step down," Coroner Williams said. He again

listened to Chin Kham who spoke in an undertone. Then he called: "Mr. Louis Sylvester."

A tall, gray-haired man came forward and was sworn in. He sat down in the witness chair and regarded the room in dignified silence.

"You are Louis Sylvester?" Chin Kham asked.

"I am."

"What is your occupation?"

"Attorney."

"You have had complete charge of the legal affairs of the late Mr. Lawton for several years?"

"I have. As a matter of fact, for the past twenty-five years."

"What would you say was Mr. Lawton's chief characteristic in business deals?"

"That is a difficult question," the lawyer said carefully, "but I should say that he was usually governed by a suspicion of others. I have often heard him remark that you had to cheat others before they cheated you. Not a philosophy that I would endorse, naturally, but it did no good to moralize to him."

"A man of his wealth, and interest in many financial schemes," Chin said, "could not be in possession of personal knowledge of all phases of his interests. How did he, therefore, protect himself along those lines?"

"By hiring the best experts that money could buy," the lawyer said promptly. "He never haggled over salaries in such cases. He trusted such men he hired, but used them to check up on everyone else."

"Even on friends with whom he was doing business?"

"I doubt if he had any real friends, but if he had he would have had his experts check on them just as thoroughly as on others."

"There is one more question I wish to ask," Chin said curiously. "You have heard the record of Mr. Lawton's dictation in which he speaks of changing his will. Is it your opinion that this dictated change in will is legal?"

"I believe so."

"That is all, thank you."

XXIII

Coroner's Inquest—June 11th (Continued)

Coroner Williams dismissed the witness. He and Chin conferred for a moment and then the coroner called the name of Miss Florence Kline. The rather attractive brunette was sworn in and seated herself in the witness chair, displaying a generous expanse of silk-clad leg.

"You are Miss Florence Kline?" Chin asked.

"Yes."

"Where are you employed, Miss Kline?"

"At the Personal Messenger Service Company."

"Last Monday morning you received a letter with instructions to have it delivered to Chin Kham at Cleveland hotel?"

"Sure. I remember it because it was a funny name."

"It was handed to you by man wearing cap and overalls, but that is only description you remember?"

"Yes."

"Were the cap and overalls new, as though perhaps they had never been worn before?"

"That's right."

"Have you seen the man who gave you the letter since entering here today?"

"I don't think so. But I don't remember much what he looked like. I remember the cap and overalls and that he was kind of short, but that's all."

Chin reached down and opened the package beside him. From it he took a brown cap and a pair of blue overalls. Both were new.

"Do these look like the cap and overalls worn by the man?" he asked.

"They look like them, yes."

"They might even be same ones?"

"They could be."

The girl left the witness chair and Coroner Williams, after listening to Chin, called Theodore Challet. The dark-haired young man looked much less harassed than he had a few days before when on the stand.

"I realize," Chin said, "that you have already told of your action upon night of Mr. Lawton's death, but I would like to hear few facts stated briefly again. You and Miss Lawton were in library when her father called her to come to study. This was approximately nine o'clock?"

"That's about right," Ted Challet said.

"After Miss Lawton left, you stepped into hallway. While there you caught sight of open safe door and saw knife within. You removed knife and examined it. You had just replaced knife when you saw Miss Lawton come out of study. It was then about fifteen minutes past nine. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Seeing that Miss Lawton was upset and thinking she might not want to see you just then, you stepped back into library. You were in library alone until Miss Lawton returned at nine-thirty. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"During this time you could not see into hallway?"

"No. The door was closed."

"In other words, there was fifteen minutes in which you could not see into hallway?"

"That's about right."

"Now, when you were in hallway before, did you notice if it was well-lighted?"

"Not too well," Ted Challet said. "There was just one light burning, as I remember."

"Where was it?"

"By the stairway. That's how I happened to see the knife. The light was in such a spot that it just hit the knife through the partly opened door."

"But it was not bright?"

"Not very."

"You have been in Lawton house many times. Isn't

there a closet in hallway near front door, where coats and rubbers are often left?"

"Yes."

"Now, try to remember, Mr. Challet. When you walked out into hallway, was door to closet open or closed?"

Ted Challet was thoughtful for a moment. "I'm not sure," he said finally, "but I think it was open two or three inches."

"Thank you," Chin Kham said, nodding to indicate he was through with Challet. He turned and whispered to Coroner Williams.

"Mr. Earl Mason," Coroner Williams called.

Dressed in a dark suit, his light hair faultlessly combed, Earl Mason looked more like a movie bookkeeper than ever as he solemnly repeated the oath. He sat down in the witness chair and stared at Chin Kham through his glasses.

"You are Earl Mason?" Chin Kham asked.

"Yes."

"You have been employed as secretary to the late Mr. Lawton for past five years?"

"Four years and eleven months, to be exact," Mason said in his precise voice.

"Exactness is always virtue of successful man," Chin said dryly. "Before that, you were employed in Rochester, New York?"

"Yes."

"There has been much talk of hatred directed towards Mr. Lawton. Did you hate him?"

"Not exactly hate. Perhaps dislike would be the word."

"I would like to check your actions briefly. On afternoon of day Mr. Lawton was killed, you were working all afternoon in upstairs office next to your room?"

"Yes, with the exception of about fifteen minutes at about four o'clock when Mr. Lawton called me downstairs. And, of course, I was down again at the dinner hour."

"You were also upstairs working at time when Mr. Lawton met his death?"

"Apparently, since he was already dead when I descended."

"On Monday morning, when threatening letter was sent, you were downtown shopping?"

"Yes."

"And on Monday evening, you returned directly to Lawton house from inquest, remained in your room a short time and then left at five: thirty-two for barber shop?"

"Yes."

"What salary did you receive as secretary?"

"Three hundred dollars per week."

"Isn't that large for a secretary?"

"Yes. But Mr. Lawton had always had difficulty finding a secretary that gave satisfaction. Since I did, he paid me well."

"That salary would, I believe, amount to about seventy-five thousand dollars in five years?"

"Seventy-eight thousand," corrected Earl Mason.

"You saved most of it?"

"Such is my habit."

"Thrift is said to be great virtue," Chin said. "But perhaps you would care to explain why deposits in your name in three banks total almost two hundred thousand dollars?"

Mason hesitated only a moment. "Acting upon Mr. Lawton's advice," he said, "I made several very wise investments on the stock market."

"With so much money, it seems odd that you didn't retire, since you disliked Mr. Lawton."

"I suppose I actually didn't dislike him," Earl Mason said. "He was unpleasant at times, but the position had many compensations."

"I can see that," Chin said. "You have stated that you know nothing about Oriental art. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"You do not understand the Pali language?"

"No."

"Perhaps then you would care to explain possession of

many books on Chinese and Tibetan art, and Pali-English dictionary, which are carefully wrapped up and hidden in closet of your room?"

"They were given to me several years ago when I first came to Cleveland. I had thought of studying the subject, but delayed doing so." Although his voice still retained its calm precision, Earl Mason was sitting even more erect in the chair and a look of tension had come into his face.

"Delay is ever curse of mankind," Chin said politely. "You did not know Mr. Edgar Lee, one time art dealer in New York?"

"No."

"You heard of him perhaps?"

"I heard Mr. Lawton mention him, but I believe all of Mr. Lawton's dealings were with him before I was employed."

"Who is Mr. Harkins, mentioned by Mr. Lawton in dictating to you the night he died?"

"An art dealer in New York."

"Why does Mr. Lawton speak of him as your friend?"

"Possibly because I suggested him to Mr. Lawton. My former employer in Rochester had purchased several things from Mr. Harkins."

"But you never met Mr. Harkins?"

"No."

"It is still not explained why Mr. Lawton referred to him as your friend?"

"He may have meant it in an ironical way."

"It is doubtful," Chin said. "Mr. Lawton's humor did not seem to possess ironical qualities. Did Mr. Lawton purchase Tibetan *thangkas,* or tapestries, which hang in study, from Mr. Harkins?"

"I believe so?"

"Were they sold as ancient art objects or modern?"

"I don't know."

"Mr. Harkins charged as high as twenty thousand dollars for some of them. Since they are all modern paintings, done in last ten years, a price of few hundred would be more than

generous to seller. Would you be surprised, Mr. Mason, to learn that Mr. Lee and Mr. Harkins are same man?"

"Yes."

"Would you also be surprised to learn that Mr. Harkins was unsuccessful in running away?"

Earl Mason licked his lips nervously and said nothing.

"You offered ready explanation of books on Oriental art. Would you also have explanation of photograph of yourself, apparently taken in Tibet, which is wrapped up with books?"

"I refuse to answer that question," Earl Mason said.

"Perhaps you might explain possession of this?" Chin asked. He reached into the package beside him and held up a small atomizer. It was glass, but the inside was covered with dried bronze.

"I refuse to answer."

"Would you remove your spectacles, place this cap on your head and face the spectators?" Chin held up the cap he had previously showed the girl.

Earl Mason hesitated and finally did as directed.

"That's him!" the girl shouted without being asked. "I'd know him anywhere without the glasses and with the cap on!"

Chin took the cap from Mason and replaced it with the overalls.

"I have no more questions to ask Mr. Mason," Chin said, "but I suggest that Lieutenant Payne accompany him from the witness stand and thereafter."

Lieutenant Payne got up and approached the secretary. For a moment Earl Mason stiffened, his eyes searching the room, then he relaxed and stepped down.

"Mr. Aaron Hess," Coroner Williams called. A short, squat man moved up and took the witness chair, after being sworn in.

"You operate a low-priced clothing store, Mr. Hess?" Chin asked.

"Yes."

"Located on Superior Avenue, near the Personal Messenger Company?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever see these before?" Chin asked, holding out the overalls and cap.

"They are from my store. See, there is still a small tag on them with my code number on it."

"Do you see anyone in this room who purchased such overalls and cap from you last Monday afternoon?"

"That fellow there did," the man said, pointing at Earl Mason. "I remember because he didn't look like the kind of fellow that buys clothes like that, if you know what I mean."

"Thank you."

"Mr. Leroy Sperry," Coroner Williams called, and a young man came up and was sworn in.

"You are salesman in the Elite Typewriter Store in Old Arcade, aren't you, Mr. Sperry?" Chin asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You were on duty there last Saturday evening?"

"Yes."

"Did a young man come in while you were there and spend some time typing on various machines, without making any purchase?"

"Yes. Like I told you when you called me, he came in and wouldn't let me show him the machines. Was very touchy about it. So I kept an eye on him. He typed on several machines, using the paper that's in them for that purpose. But then pretty soon, he took some paper out of his own pocket, typed on it and left. I figured it was some cheapskate who had something he wanted typed free."

"Do you see the man in this room?"

"Sure, it was him." He pointed at Earl Mason.

"Thank you."

"As may have been inferred," Chin Kham said to the jury, "Earl Mason murdered Mr. Horace Lawton and Mr. Philip Norton. I have been sure of it ever since discovering the missing Buddha, but had nothing to go on but logical reasoning. More was needed.

"Mr. Mason planned well, but was also aided by luck. Two

things in case blinded eyes to important facts. One thing was matter of hate. Everyone hated Mr. Lawton, almost everyone liked Mr. Norton. But these things were unimportant. Mr. Mason was smart enough to lie where it fitted best, but he neither hated Mr. Lawton nor liked Mr. Norton. His interest was purely one of profit in beginning and of self-preservation later.

"Other thing which led us astray was fact that important question seemed to be *why* Kum Bum Buddha was hidden beneath bronze coat. Important question was really *how* it was done. Since period of time for murder of Mr. Lawton was short, it must have been done earlier. Such a thought first brought up question of why Mr. Lawton didn't notice it. Questioning of Mason brought out fact that Mr. Lawton was near-sighted, and because of vanity seldom wore his glasses. Therefore it was safe gamble on part of murderer that he wouldn't notice it for a few hours.

"Once having arrived at this spot, it was obvious there was only one time it could have been done—in the period between five-thirty and six-thirty on Friday afternoon when the entire lower floor of house was empty. This was when I knew that Mr. Mason must have been guilty, although there was no proof. Roberts was with Mr. Green, Mr. Lawton was downtown. Upstairs was Miss Lawton, Mrs. Forbes and daughter, and Mr. Mason. But Mr. Mason was only one who fitted into theory that Mr. Lawton was killed and Buddha hidden because of Buddha-fraud. Miss Lawton and Mrs. Forbes perhaps had emotional motives for murder—but could not be fitted into profit motive.

"As for murder itself, Mrs. Forbes would have been seen by Roberts as she passed by butler's pantry. Roberts was hardly in strategic position to commit murder. Second murder seemed to clear Mr. Challet. There was question of gaining access to house with Mr. Green. Miss Lawton and Mr. Mason were left. Miss Lawton could have returned from upstairs to commit murder; Mr. Mason could easily have come down from his room near stairway and returned in fifteen-

minute period. Both Miss Lawton and Mr. Mason were best prospects for learning combination of private safe. *But* safe was open when Mr. Challet went into hall, indicating murderer had been preparing for task when Miss Lawton started out of library. Logical place to hide was in closet. Then murderer got break when Mr. Challet handled knife, leaving fingerprints. By elimination through logical reasoning, Mr. Mason seemed only candidate.

"Next, murder of Philip Norton. Mr. Mason was completely truthful in matter of alibi, although it was probably different than one he planned. But he was intelligent enough to take advantage of opportunity. When Roberts thought he heard someone call, he evidently heard Mr. Norton uttering death cry. Mr. Norton had indicated some suspicion to Mr. Mason that morning and Mr. Mason was stopping suspicion from reaching maturity. When Roberts thought he heard Mr. Norton answer him, latter was already dead. He lay across desk in such a way that Roberts accepted fact that he was looking at something. Voice was that of Mason, out of sight. If Roberts had investigated farther, he would undoubtedly have died then, too.

"Mr. Mason had taken Mr. Norton's watch, dropped it on floor so it would seem as if it had been broken in struggle. He had set it at six o'clock, knowing that murder might not be discovered until much later. He probably had some other alibi in mind. But then as he was leaving, he met Roberts who served to establish the fact that he was apparently leaving while Mr. Norton was alive. That was all he needed.

"I believe investigation will prove that Mr. Mason spent some time in the East. Undoubtedly he was at Kum Bum, as witnessed by photograph. He probably got idea of Kum Bum Buddha fraud there and brought it back to Mr. Lee. Then he got idea of working for Mr. Lawton as further in to more frauds. He sent letter of application, with forged letter of recommendation, from Rochester. I imagine he also found way of letting Mr. Lawton know indirectly that he was expert in matter of Oriental art. This last is undoubtedly main

reason he was hired, and is reason for large salary.

"Perhaps it was Mr. Lawton's idea first that he should appear to know nothing about Oriental art objects. This gave him perfect chance to check up on objects which people attempted to sell him and also to check up on purchases of Mr. Norton. In the meantime, Mr. Mason is engineering more big sales to Mr. Lawton through Edgar Lee, now known as Harkins. But Mr. Mason saw upset of profitable plan when I called to view Kum Bum Buddha. Although not ordinarily man of violence, he resorted to it. He expected real motive back of murder to be hidden and theft of Buddha substituted, believing I would accept Buddha as authentic since I could not see it. But that failed. He saw danger in me then, and prepared warning note on following day.

"In some way he managed to get Philip Norton to go to typewriter store and type notes. Lieutenant Payne will undoubtedly learn how this was done. Logical method would be to have typed clue and to give Norton the idea that it was typed in such a place. Knowing Norton was anxious to do something, it would be easy to suggest the two of them check all downtown typewriter stores and then see to it that Mr. Norton drew, among others, the important one. He was sure that once we discovered presence of Mr. Norton in store on *Monday* morning, we would not check back on Saturday. That was important point, and after that, simple disguise was used at Messenger Service Company.

"All other points which I brought out in questioning, such as bank accounts and contents of room, can be checked. And Mr. Harkins is safely in jail in New York. After Mr. Mason made attempt on my life, I suspected Mr. Harkins might be advised to flee. It had also occurred to me that Mr. Harkins might be Mr. Lee. So I sent telegram to New York asking friend to check on similarity and, if it was found, to tell New York police Mr. Harkins was wanted here. Perhaps he has already confessed."

As he finished speaking, Chin Kham stepped down and stood beside the table which held the exhibits.

For what occurred next there was no warning. Earl Mason had been sitting quietly beside Lieutenant Payne throughout Chin's remarks. Now he reached carefully into his pocket and came out with a gun. He aimed it quickly at Chin and pulled the trigger.

Lieutenant Payne acted almost automatically at the sight of the gun. His left arm struck out at Mason's wrist. He hit it just in time. The gun tilted up and the bullet crashed into the ceiling. At the same time Lieutenant Payne's right cross smacked against Mason's jaw. The lieutenant leaned over and yanked the gun from Mason's limp hand.

During the confusion that followed the gunshot, Chin moved swiftly. He had originally intended to lose his balance as he left the table, but this served better. His left hand swept the dictaphone record, marked Exhibit B, from the table to the floor and he very carefully stepped on it.

When order was again restored, Chin was gazing ruefully at the small pieces of record on the floor.

"So sorry," he said, looking up at Coroner Williams. "Extreme fear at time of gunshot caused me to jar table. Record rolled to floor where stumbling feet of frightened Tibetan accidentally stepped on it. So sorry for unpardonable awkwardness in destroying valuable evidence."

"Can't be helped now, I guess," Coroner Williams said. "There wasn't much of anything important on it anyway, except the part about the will."

The coroner turned to give instructions to his jury, and there was triumph in the gaze that he bent upon Juror Number Five.

As he mouthed familiar phrases of instructions, Coroner Williams felt that his day had been full. Particularly so, since he alone had been watching Chin Kham at the moment when all other eyes were on Earl Mason and Lieutenant Payne. In fact, so great was his admiration for what he had seen that only one way of expressing it occurred to him.

Clever, these Chinese, he thought.

PART VII

Wherefore are these things hid?

—William Shakespeare

XXIV

Daymoora hla Rimpoche

After the inquest was over, at the insistence of Lieutenant Payne who had turned his prisoner over to one of his men, Chin Kham and Kay Barrett found themselves sitting opposite the lieutenant in the dining room of the Cleveland hotel.

"That was a great job, Chin," Lieutenant Payne said. "I take everything back I said about you this morning, even though I still think that lecture was a grandstand stunt."

"I'm still sore at being left out of the fun, in addition to the suggestion the lecture was a grandstand stunt," Kay added.

"Lecture contained basic method of solution," Chin said. "Four points I mentioned were: actions of suspects at time other than murder; characteristics of Mr. Lawton; looking for Mr. Lee in unexplored spot; and belief that murderer was telling truth in case of alibi covering murder of Mr. Norton. First point covers period when Buddha was disguised, which was most important in pointing to Mr. Mason. Second point deals with fact that Mr. Lawton had fear of being cheated, which was in keeping with other traits of Mr. Lawton and indicated he would want expert on Oriental art around him. Mr. Norton admitted he was not really an expert on Tibet, thus leaving Mr. Mason only one in field who could be. Third point covers Mr. Harkins, since he was perhaps only unexplored field. So many things happened we forgot mention of Mr. Harkins in very beginning. Fourth point is now self-explaining."

"Well, it's a good thing it came out all right," Lieutenant Payne said. "I don't suppose you noticed that I got a telegram just as you were taking over?"

"I did," Kay said. "Did it have something to do with

this case? Or is that a secret?"

"In a way," Lieutenant Payne said casually. "I sent a telegram to a friend of mine on the New York Police Force asking him to see if he could dig up any dope on a couple of people named Chin Kham and Kay Barrett."

There was a moment of silence, and then Kay laughed. Chin grinned as Payne glanced from her to him.

"So you found out about us?" Kay asked.

"That telegram was from my friend and said that two parties by that name ran a private detective agency in New York, dealing mostly in jewel and art work for insurance companies."

"Don't shoot, stranger, we give up," Kay said.

"So what's all this Tibetan stuff you were handing out and how come you were here?"

"Chin really is a Tibetan," Kay said, "only an American-born one. He was educated here and in Tibet. We weren't lying when we said that he had an uncle who was the former Tashi Lama of Tibet, but Chin is really an American and talks even better English than you've heard—including jive talk. But he really does lecture on Tibetan art and is probably one of the greatest experts on both Tibetan and Chinese art in America. Because of the things we work on, we usually use this lecture business to get in with the people we want to contact. Whatever we make from the lecturing is contributed to a local charity."

"What were you doing here?"

"Julius Green hired us to find out if Horace Lawton had that knife of his which dates back to the Han Dynasty in China. He had told us that he was sure Lawton had it, and he said that the lecture would be sure to get us an invitation from Lawton. It did, only the knife was in Lawton's back when we arrived, as you know. We thought we were out a fee, but Green retained us to work on the murder, since he felt suspicion was directed at him. He gave us a post-dated check for five thousand dollars—but it was to be stopped at the bank if we didn't solve the case ourselves. That's the rea-

son Chin was so secretive with you, and it's also the reason I was so damn sore when he kept being just as secretive with me.

"Incidentally," Chin added, "that is also the explanation of Green's whereabouts last Monday morning which he refused to give you. He was down here, talking to us. We weren't so sure that Green was innocent, either, as you may guess in thinking over some of my guesses, but the five grand was worth shooting at."

"I'll be damned!" Lieutenant Payne said. The thing that amazed him the most was the change in Chin. His speech was only a little different, but somehow it changed his whole personality. Before he had had a polite smile; now it was an engaging grin.

"Then you aren't a Buddhist or a lama?" Payne said.

"No," Chin said, "but I cut my teeth on all that stuff. My father came to America after he dropped out of Buddhism and became a Christian. He was pretty intelligent, and wanted me to get both sides, which is also why he sent me over to the University of Trashilhumpo after I finished at Ohio University. In the meantime, when we need it, the straight-from-Tibet gag goes over pretty well."

"I'll be damned!" Lieutenant Payne said again. He glanced at his watch and finished his cup of coffee. "I've got to get home or my wife'll brain me. She'll want to know all about the case. You know, she guessed it was Mason, but I didn't pay any attention to her because her reason was that she didn't like him and that it was always careful guys like him that go haywire. . . . Thanks a lot, Chin, and if either of you ever want anything, including the City Hall, in Cleveland Heights, let me know."

"Goodbye, lieutenant," Kay said. "And thanks to you for letting us play ball in your league."

"*Daymoora hla Rimpoche,*" Chin said.

"Cut out the doubletalk or I'll run you in," Payne said, grinning. "And give my regards to the Tashi Lama." He strode out of the dining room.

THE LAUGHING BUDDHA MURDERS

By

Richard Foster

THE LAUGHING BUDDHA couldn't just have got up and walked away. Statues haven't been known to walk since Pygmalion brought Galatea to life. But this was only one of the problems facing the police after the death of the ruthless millionaire art-fancier and political tyrant who had but one friend in the world. Another problem was the entrance into the case of Chin Kham, good-looking young Tibetan scholar, who seemed to know more than he should about what was going on. It's a particularly engrossing story, with Chin himself providing unique interest—and a delightful surprise ending. Another great

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THE LAUGHING BUDDHA MURDERS